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POISON IN A GARDEN SUBURB

By the Same Authors:
SUPERINTENDENT WILSON'S HOLIDAY

POISON IN A GARDEN SUBURB

BY

G. D. H. & M. Cole

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POISON IN A GARDEN SUBURB

Chapter I

THE CHARACTERS IN THE ORDER OF THEIR APPEARANCE

" Disgusting! " said Miss Lydia Redford suddenly, after a prolonged study of the large hall, panelled in light oak and decorated with suitable scrolls from the works of Stevenson, in which the Literary Institute of Medstead Garden Suburb had its soirées. " Disgusting! " The remark was addressed to nobody in particular but a little old lady with a face like a surprised robin, who was sitting next her, after an involuntary jump did her best to sustain the conversation.

" Of course," she said, following the direction of Miss Lydia's gaze, which now appeared to be fixed on the legs of some of the female members of the audience. " I think some of the young people nowadays go a little *far,* perhaps. But we all know that fewer and simpler clothes are so much more ——"

" I'm not talking about the girls," Miss Lydia interrupted. " They're all right. They've got pretty legs and pretty backs, and if they think their backs look prettier burnt brick-red it's no concern of mine. I'm talking about the old women. In my time we were taught that flesh over fifty years old wasn't fit for exposure in public."

" But surely," the little old lady persisted, " it's all part of real *openness* of mind. All this *concealment*

which *we* were taught ——" Miss Lydia interrupted with a heartfelt snort, and the little old lady ducked her head down to her lap, and in a hoarse mutter added unexpectedly, " Let concealment, like a worm in the bud, feed on her damask cheek."

" *Damask cheek!* " said Miss Lydia, in a tone which left it uncertain whether the remark was intended as a repetition or an expletive.

Several persons in neighbouring rows were now looking round with interest and, thus emboldened, the little old lady popped up her head again and observed:

" Shakespeare, you know. He knew *so much* about human nature. So neglected nowadays. Concealment . . . encourages people to hide their thoughts, and lead a—an unnatural life."

" Nonsense! " said Miss Lydia. " A woman who's reached fifty without learning to lead an unnatural life is a mental imbecile and ought to be put in a home! "

At sixty-five, the tones of Miss Lydia's voice, when the topic interested her, were still clear and ringing; and the last remark, coinciding with a chance pause in the buzz of conversation, directed all eyes in the Institute's hall upon the speaker. The congregation which had met together to hear Sir Arthur Dawlish discourse on " Modern Aspects of Eugenics " was not of the kind which possesses lorgnettes; but if there had been lorgnettes available, one felt that at least fifty indignant pairs would have been turned upon Miss Lydia. The pause, prolonging itself almost into a hostile silence, eventually penetrated the

consciousness of a pleasant, fresh-faced youth, obviously not yet past the University age, who looked up with a glance of dismay, hastily left the girl to whom he was administering an ice, and came clambering rapidly across the chairs.

" Oh, Auntie! " he said, making a rueful grimace as he dropped into a vacant chair at Miss Lydia's side, " you're the most dangerous person to let loose at a quiet meeting! The moment my back's turned you start dropping bombs."

" I don't like them, Tony," his great-aunt replied in a voice only slightly modulated. " They're not decent. Old scarecrows showing their withered legs —and quoting Shakespeare about them! Damask cheek, indeed! "

" Blessings on you, dearest," Tony said. " Look in another direction. There are lots of old ladies here with plenty on."

" Djibbahs! " snapped Miss Lydia, rather without warrant, for there was scarcely a djibbah to be seen. " Just the sort of thing to make a fat old woman look fatter! There's no need to make a parade of it, if you're unlucky enough to have a figure that the fashions of the day don't suit. Look at that woman who's got herself up in a fishing-net! " She pointed to the wife of a prominent local solicitor, whose overdress of blue silk net was perhaps a little unsuited to her unusually brawny proportions. " Every knot on it's saying to the next knot ' Hold on! I'm coming! ' And, good gracious me, whatever's this? "

" S-s-s-sh, darling," Tony said. " This is our gracious patroness. This is Mrs. Fremantle."

There was an instant hushing of the hubbub as Mrs. Fremantle entered, and a very necessary clearing of the gangways. There is a famous passage in one of Conrad's *Essays,* known to all persons as cultured as the inhabitants of the Medstead Garden Suburb, which describes with unforgettable vividness how a great ship, entering port at a pace infinitesimally too fast, tore slowly away the whole side of a stone quay. Remembering this, irreverent members of the Institute called Mrs. Fremantle "the Leviathan," for one had the same feeling, on seeing her approach, that if she did not slacken that majestic movement in time, the intervening furniture, to say nothing of the walls of the room, would be inexorably ground to pieces. Even Miss Lydia was for a minute surprised into silence as the great figure, robed in a purple garment which fitted her like an excellently made loose cover, advanced to the dais and leaned a moment on a rather alarmingly flimsy table, looking as though she was about to deliver an exhortation to a nobler life. As a matter of fact, the sonorous tones only announced that the distinguished lecturer had unfortunately been detained, and that the entertainment would therefore be a few minutes late in beginning.

"I could have told her that," Miss Lydia commented scornfully. "Arthur Dawlish never was in time for anything in his life. I wish he'd hurry, though. I came to hear him, not to look at this menagerie. Why on earth do you spend your holidays here, Tony?"

"Vac, auntie," the Oxford purist corrected her.

" I don't always. But Ray likes living here, I don't know why, and I like staying with her when I've nothing better to do."

" Oh, it's all right for your sister," Miss Lydia said. " She's freer than she would be at home, with your father's ridiculous ideas, and I don't suppose anyone here would do her any particular harm, even if they aren't going to be any use. She'll grow out of it. And there seem to be some girls who aren't too bad for you. Don't make faces, Tony. Young men have to have young women provided for them, and Rachel's friends are quite suitable. But, Tony, I don't think Rachel's looking well—or happy. Is anything the matter with her? "

" Not that I know of," said Tony, as perplexed as most brothers when asked about their sisters' health. " What should there be? "

" I don't know. But I don't think she's looking well. Perhaps she's quarrelled with that absurd young man of hers."

" I'm sure she hasn't."

" Well, then, why doesn't she bring him along to see me? He isn't the kind of young man who amuses me, but I'd like to ask him if he's been up to anything. Do you see him anywhere? "

" No," said Tony, looking around.

" I'll see if one of these people can find him." She buttonholed a little sandy-haired man who was passing behind her chair. " Do you know Mr. Delahaye by sight? Could you find him for me? "

" Delahaye? Delahaye? " The little man made a gesture which seemed to indicate an almost violent

lack of interest. "No, I'm afraid . . . I don't know him at all. Will you excuse me, please? I'm in a hurry." He pushed past.

"Mannerless little creature," said Miss Lydia. "Who was it?"

"Cayley, his name is," Tony answered. "Something to do with a bank, I think. He knows a frightful lot about proportional representation."

"Does he, indeed? Well, why does he say he doesn't know Martin Delahaye?"

"Perhaps," Tony suggested mildly, "he doesn't."

"Nonsense!" Miss Lydia said. "He knew the moment I asked him. I've had practice enough in telling when a man isn't speaking the truth. Of course *you* can't tell; you young people all believe in frankness, and never telling a lie even for politeness' sake, and the consequence is you none of you know a liar when you see one. Though what on earth that creature should want to tell me a lie for, I can't think. And he might at any rate have had the decency to *pretend* to go and find Martin."

"Can I find anyone for you?" a tall fair-haired man, with bright, eager blue eyes, and a voice perhaps a shade too courteous, asked.

"Thank you." Miss Lydia surveyed the speaker. "I want a young man called Martin Delahaye, if he's anywhere to be found. Do you happen to know him?"

"Certainly," the man responded. "I'll get him for you. Can I get you anything else? Some coffee, or an ice?"

"No, thank you very much. Now that's the other

extreme," Miss Lydia said, as the man disappeared. "Too polite by half. Who is he?"

"Dr. Shorthouse. One of those new-fashioned doctors everybody's beginning to go to. Ray rather likes him."

"Rachel had better be careful, then," Miss Lydia said. "That young man's got an eye: he even uses it on an old woman like me. And he's a climber, too, if ever I saw one. It's a dangerous combination, particularly now that women all treat their doctors as if they were priests. Very hard on the doctors, too, when they haven't been brought up to it. If you want St. Anthonys you oughtn't to train them in medical schools. Why, there's Eric Pennell!"

"Pennell!" Even Tony seemed startled, as he turned his eyes to the door, where a young man in evening dress, with rather the build and appearance of the Prince of Wales, had just entered. "What on earth is he doing here? I can't believe eugenics is in his line."

"No, but something else is," Miss Lydia said. "Use your eyes, Tony. Don't you know Eric Pennell by now? Look at that face beside him. Eric would go anywhere for a face, and I must say this is a really striking one. I think I'd better have a word with him. Eric!" she called loudly across the intervening chairs. "Eric! Come here!" The young man looked up with an amiable smile, and indicated that he would come as soon as circumstances permitted. His head, as if it had been on an elastic band, then sprang back to gaze on the woman at his side. Miss Lydia sat for a moment silent, lost in contempla-

tion of her.

She had, indeed, one of those fortunate faces which remain lovely whatever the taste or clothes of the age. Her dark hair, neither bobbed nor shingled, was wound around an almost perfectly-shaped head, set upon a neck of astonishing grace and whiteness. Beneath a low forehead, wide, long-lashed gray eyes gazed up into her companion's face, and a red curving mouth, which owed nothing to lipstick, smiled at whatever he was saying. And the nose, which in so many otherwise beautiful faces looks as though it had been acquired second-hand and in a hurry, was perfectly straight in profile, with just sufficient shortening and widening at the tip to prevent austerity. Sir Eric Pennell, feeding this goddess with ices, was obviously in the seventh heaven, and even Miss Lydia was sufficiently absorbed not to notice the arrival of her great-niece.

" Penny for your thoughts, Auntie," a pleasant voice said in her ear and she started.

" I was thinking," she said, with something of that frankness she had a minute before derided, " that it's a good thing you aren't in competition with Eric Pennell's new young woman, my dear."

Rachel looked up at the door, and laughed without reserve. Brown-haired and brown-eyed, with a wave in her hair and colour in her cheeks, she was good-looking enough to have no particular quarrel with her mirror, without reaching a standard which could compete for a moment with the vision at the doorway. " Oh, we're all non-starters where Mrs. Cayley's concerned," she said. " Here's Martin, Auntie."

She turned to greet a tall dark-haired young man with a rather unhealthily pale face and a discontented expression, whom Dr. Shorthouse was shepherding towards them.

" Cayley! " Miss Lydia emitted a noise almost like the hoot of a motor horn. " Do you mean to tell me that that—Helen of Troy is married to that little sandy-haired fellow who knows all about something or other and can't waste a second on common politeness? Eric had better be careful. I *must* have a word with him. Hullo, Martin, there you are at last."

" I've collected him successfully," Dr. Shorthouse said in his soft voice. " Now won't you let me get you an ice, or something? " His eyes persuaded her.

" No, thank you," Miss Lydia said again. " We'll fag Mr. Delahaye if we want anything. I don't know who that young man thinks I am," she went on, as Dr. Shorthouse departed, " but he seems uncommonly anxious to get himself into my good graces."

" It's natural to him," Martin Delahaye said rather sourly. " He likes women of all ages. And he needs countenance of any sort. He's an abortionist ——"

" You don't know that! " from Rachel.

" Or supposed to be, anyway."

" That's slanderous as well as uncharitable," Miss Lydia, who did not like being called ' women of all ages,' snapped at him. " None of you young people know the difference nowadays—nor will, till you find yourselves in court on a criminal libel charge."

" What *is* the difference? " Tony asked. " *I* don't

want to find myself in court—not by mistake, anyway."

"*That's* the difference," Miss Lydia said. "One brings you into court; the other only gets you asked out to dinner. Well, Eric, how are you? Do you know Mr. Delahaye—Sir Eric Pennell?"

Sir Eric gave a smiling greeting, to which young Delahaye responded with a scowl and a grunt.

"How are you, Eric? And how are your investments?" Miss Lydia asked.

"Oh, very well, thanks. Both of us. At least the brokers say so. What are you going to touch me for, Miss Redford? Cats or criminals?"

"It's not for me, child. It's for yourself. You'll be needing all you've got very soon, unless my eyes deceive me." Miss Lydia nodded towards the door.

Eric Pennell blushed, and gave the smile that had caused him to appear in the picture-papers as "one of the most popular of London's young bachelors." (They might also have added "and one of the most susceptible").

"Don't tease me, Miss Redford," he said. "She *is* lovely, isn't she?"

"Lovely enough," Delahaye asked, "to interest *you* in eugenics?" The tone, rather than the words, caused Pennell to raise his well-bred eyebrows, and Miss Lydia to direct a glance at the speaker. Rachel, with a worried look on her face, slipped in between her fiancé and the others.

"What's the matter, Martin?" she whispered.

"Why should anything be the matter?"

"You sound so cross."

" Well, I can't stand that fellow Pennell. Showing off his money all over the place! What does he want to come here for? " His eyes, under knitted brows, were staring restlessly round the room.

" S-s-sh, Martin! He'll hear you! "

" I don't care if he does. What's it matter what he thinks? "

" Well, you needn't be rude."

" I'm not being rude. I just don't want to talk to him, that's all. Nor to anybody. I've got a stomach-ache."

" Oh, Martin! Not another! Is it bad? " He nodded, and gave a convulsive wriggle of his shoulders as if he really were in considerable pain. " Why don't you do something about it? "

" I can't. Nothing does any good. I told you."

" But you haven't tried! You won't do anything anyone suggests. You might at least try some bicarbonate——" In the effort of conversing in whispers, Rachel's voice became nervously insistent, and the young man turned on her angrily.

" *Will* you stop bothering me? You don't know anything about it, and I'm sick of being badgered."

" Martin! "

With a great effort Delahaye pulled himself together, and looked slightly ashamed.

" I'm sorry, Ray. I can't be properly polite. If you knew how rotten I'm feeling—I hardly slept a wink last night, I had such a filthy pain. . . . Look here . . . I'm going to cut this. I'm sorry, but I can't stand it any longer. Make my apologies to your aunt, and say the sight of ices gives me the cold

shivers. See you to-morrow some time." And before she could say more he was slipping away towards the door, just as Eric Pennell also escaped to his lovely lady.

" I've warned him," Miss Lydia said, " and I can't do more. That *is* the face that launched a thousand ships, and if it wants poor Eric I'm afraid it will have to have him. Your young man was very rude, my dear. What have you done with him? "

" He's gone," Rachel said rather unhappily. " He says he's got a bad stomach-ache."

" Oh, well, in that case you needn't worry about his manners," said Miss Lydia cheerfully. " Men have no self-control; they're just like animals when anything goes wrong with their digestions. He'll be grovelling with apologies to-morrow, you'll see."

" He's always getting stomach-aches lately," Rachel said, wrinkling her forehead. " I can't think what can be the matter with him. He never used to, but now he sometimes gets two or three in a week, and he says he has an awful pain. But he won't see a doctor."

" Depend upon it," said Miss Lydia, " it's his liver that's wrong, and it's that place where he works having a bad effect on him. What do you call it? Society for Left-handed Information ——"

" Left *Wing* Information, Auntie."

" Well, wings or hands, it doesn't much matter. It's no sort of place for a man to work in."

" It's healthier than *my* office," Rachel expostulated. " And I'm quite all right."

" You're a woman, my dear," said Miss Lydia,

regarding her with affection. "It doesn't hurt women to work in crank affairs for twopence a week and their tube fares. Women are still new enough to paid work of any sort to find it all exciting. Besides, they fall in love with the secretary or the chairman or somebody, and that keeps them going."

"Suppose the secretary and the chairman aren't men?" Tony asked with amusement.

"They fall in love with them all the same, and a good thing too," Miss Lydia replied with spirit. "I know it's supposed to be indecent, nowadays, but I can't imagine why. You'd think the men would be relieved to see the women falling in love with one another, with so many too many of them about, poor things. But you men are so greedy, Tony; you all really want a harem, if you could only get it. Anyway, those places are all right for women. But a man can't exist on something that hasn't got any proper business to be there—he knows he ought to be doing some real work, and it preys on his liver, naturally, and then his pores get clogged. If I were you, Rachel, I should give Martin some Eno's, and send him into business. It would be better for him, and better for you too. A healthy girl oughtn't to go about with a man with a perpetual stomach-ache, it's not natural."

"S-s-s-sh!" said various people, crossly. Miss Lydia adjusted herself in her chair, and looked up.

"Heavens, it's that—that Organ Woman again," she said.

"—I now have to introduce to you," Mrs. Fremantle boomed from the platform, "the eminent

scientist, Sir Arthur Dawlish, who is honoring us with his presence here to-night. It would be idle for me to attempt to give you a list of Sir Arthur's attainments in every walk of scientific life, but ——" She did, however, attempt it, and produced a noble-sounding list of qualifications.

"Good gracious me!" said Miss Lydia, securing the last word. "I should never have known Arthur Dawlish, with all that white hair! And he's got his tie all under one ear, as usual." Greatly to the annoyance of her neighbours, she made pantomimic gestures at the platform until she caught the eye of Sir Arthur, who smiled, bowed, and shifted his tie, to a rather more unconventional position, before he began his address.

Chapter II

THE CURTAIN RISES

"—and with these reflections we may perhaps leave the race itself to determine its own future."

As Sir Arthur's silvery tones ceased, there was the usual slight buzz and shifting of chairs. One or two short-winded listeners rose furtively and made for the door, among them Dr. Shorthouse, shepherding a girl in green. A young woman in the row behind him, with a heavy black bob and dark thick eyebrows, rose and made as if to follow them, but was stopped by a wave of the majestic hand from the platform.

"We will *now*," said Mrs. Fremantle—and at the sound of her voice the faint-hearted sank guiltily into their chairs and tried to look as if they had only been settling themselves more comfortably——"We will *now* have our usual half-hour interval for questions. Will you please endeavour to put your questions as briefly and clearly as possible and *not* attempt to make speeches. Discussion will be permitted at the usual time. I myself should like to ask Sir Arthur whether, in his opinion——" She embarked upon a question of enormous length and complexity, and Miss Lydia Redford yawned in her chair.

"How much of this shall I have to listen to?" she asked her nephew. "I should like to have a

word with Arthur, but I can't stand much more of it."

"The meeting is now open for discussion! I shall allow each speaker three minutes only, by my watch. Mr. Cayley!"

Three or four chairs away, the little sandy-haired man rose, and began in a voice of quite astonishing depth and ferocity.

"While I must express the greatest admiration for Sir Arthur Dawlish's learning and powers of eloquence, I must confess myself utterly astonished by the casual—I might say the *criminally* casual—way in which he has passed by the responsibility of the State for the segregation of persons mentally and physically unfitted to beget their kind. I must say, that, speaking as one not without experience of public affairs ——"

"Bet you half-a-crown he gets it round to proportional representation inside the three minutes," Tony whispered.

"Oh, what people!" Miss Lydia sighed. "Isn't there going to be *anything* worth hearing?"

An instant later her question was suddenly and dramatically answered. In the middle of a flowing period Mr. Cayley stopped, gasped, and put his hand to his throat. For a second or two he stood, swaying, while his hands sawed the air, and his eyes stared as if they were going to start from his head; then there burst from his mouth a horrible choking cry, and he pitched to the lap of a stout lady, who in an uncontrollable spasm of revulsion pushed her chair sharply backwards. The scrape of the chair

on the wooden floor and the sound of Harold Cayley's head striking it came almost simultaneously, and were followed by more scrapings, as Tony and two or three other men tried to go to the rescue. Cayley, on the floor, writhed and choked in the grip of some appalling spasm. His body was curved fantastically in the air, and his heels beat on the floor. At the back of the room Mrs. Cayley had risen, and was standing with a white, irresolute face, looking as if she scarcely knew what to do.

"Silence, please!" Mrs. Fremantle's voice rang through the clatter which was beginning. "Will you all kindly keep your seats! Is there a doctor present?"

From a far corner of the room a tall, portly gentleman, with 'family practitioner' written all over him, who had already risen, stopped for an instant in his progress towards them. "I am Mr. Cayley's doctor," he said. "Please let me pass."

"Ah, Dr. Midhurst! Thank you. Will you please make room, over there?"

With great alacrity those sitting near the fallen man pushed back their chairs as Dr. Midhurst moved portentously, rather than walked, towards them. Even at that moment Rachel could not help the thought crossing her mind that Dr. Midhurst looked more like a medical procession than a single doctor; but it was driven away instantly by the shriek of agony which came from Cayley's lips as the spasm momentarily relaxed its hold on his throat. Three times he screamed before the doctor reached him, and then seemed to slip into a kind of unconscious-

ness. Rachel found the room swimming, and clutched at her brother's hand. Like most girls, she had never before seen any physical illness much more serious than toothache, and the reality was more than she could have imagined.

By this time Mrs. Cayley, roused from her trance, had pushed her way through the intervening chairs, and reached her husband's side, but Dr. Midhurst, with a large hand, motioned her back, and she remained standing quite still, with her hands clasped on the back of a chair. She had still not said a word.

"We must get him out of here," Dr. Midhurst said. He had only glanced rapidly at Cayley's eyes, and felt his pulse. "I can't do anything on the floor. Will one or two of you help me? Quickly, before the spasm comes on again."

Tony and a couple of other men sprang up, and under the doctor's instructions lifted Cayley up and proceeded to carry him to the door. They had hardly, however, gone a couple of yards, when there was a sound at the door, and Dr. Shorthouse, his fair face white as a sheet, and his eyes staring with some unexplained emotion, burst into the room. At once he saw the little procession.

"What's all this?" he cried in a shrill voice. "What are you doing? Let me come! Mr. Cayley is my patient." He pushed his way to them. Dr. Midhurst raised a large soothing hand.

"Don't be absurd, my dear Shorthouse. Cayley has been under my hands for ten years. Please get out of the way."

"I won't! I tell you he's my patient!"

"Really, Shorthouse——"

Mrs. Cayley's voice now broke in. It was beautiful, but not of the kind which easily shows emotion. "Dr. Shorthouse is quite correct. He is my husband's medical attendant."

"What . . . I . . . well . . ." Dr. Midhurst seemed to be growing purple with indignation.

"You hear that!" Shorthouse cried. "Now will you let me——"

But this extraordinary altercation was suddenly cut short by the patient himself, who screamed again and began to leap in his bearers' arms so that they all but dropped him. Taken aback, Shorthouse withdrew a pace or two, and, the other doctor standing his ground, the bearers proceeded out of the door, Cayley screaming and writhing in their arms.

With a few whispered words, Mrs. Cayley attempted to follow them, but Dr. Midhurst gently put her back. "Not now, my dear. Presently," he said; and went out after his patient.

For an instant, Shorthouse stood and stared after them; then, with a bitten-off exclamation, he sprang for the door, but clumsily, so that he all but knocked over one of the small refreshment tables which were standing about the room.

"You'd better be careful of that," a woman's voice said. "That's the glass Mr. Cayley was drinking out of." Shorthouse turned round and stared at the speaker, a thin woman with pincenez who might have been a schoolmistress. "There

might," the incisive voice added, " be something in it."

With a smothered gasp Shorthouse reached out his hand for the glass, but the woman held it firmly. " No, you don't," she said. A murmur, half of horror and half of excitement, went round the room, and penetrated to Shorthouse, who swung about and looked round. Confronting the excited, half-hostile gaze of two hundred pairs of eyes he suddenly seemed to shrink. A great flood of colour mounted in his white face, and he took hold of the back of a chair. " I . . . I . . . " he stammered, and stopped. The black-browed girl who had tried to follow him out at the end of the lecture, and who was sitting close behind, leaned forward and spoke to him, and, almost automatically as it seemed, his hand closed on her arm. The hall was silent, strained with attention.

The Patroness broke up the drama. " Miss Longman, will you please bring me that glass? " she said. " *I* will take it in charge. Dr. Shorthouse, you had better go and see if you can render any assistance. They may be in need of another doctor. The rest of you will kindly keep your seats for the present."

Pulling himself together, Shorthouse made stumblingly for the door. In the doorway, he all but collided with one of the bearers, returning with a very grave face. The latter went up to the dais, and had a whispered conversation with Mrs. Fremantle, who listened and nodded portentously. Then he came down and crossing over to Mrs. Cayley said something in her ear. She looked up at him with

her mouth open and her great eyes darkened with fear, and after a second's hesitation, rose and went out with him, Sir Eric Pennell gazing after her with the look of a stricken sheep.

The audience stared in blank apprehension as the door closed behind them, and no one felt any surprise when Mrs. Fremantle slowly rose, and said in a voice suitably muted, " Ladies and gentlemen, I am sorry to have to inform you that Mr. Cayley is very seriously ill. The doctors think, in fact, that he is dying." She paused a moment for the information to sink in. " And Dr. Midhurst tells me that there is no doubt that he has been poisoned, and within the last hour or so." Another pause. " I am afraid I must ask none of you to leave this building until the police arrive."

Chapter III

TALK IN THE PIT

No one was really surprised; but there is a difference between the expectation of a fact and its realisation, and for a few seconds, which seemed almost an eternity, that respectable middle-class audience, hardly any of which had ever come within miles of a ' police-court case,' sat in an absolute dead silence, taking in the implications of Mrs. Fremantle's statement. But only for a few seconds. Then, as the immediate shock passed, there was the faint sound of somebody's dress rustling, followed by a movement of a chair, and then by a simultaneous sizzle of soft whisperings in several parts of the room. One of the whispers came from Rachel Redford, who, though she had always thought herself a modern and self-possessed young woman, and, to do her justice, might have remained so had she been called upon to act in any way, at the moment was completely appalled by the scene she had just witnessed.

" Aunt Lydia! " she breathed rather than said. " Can't—isn't there—can't anyone do anything? "

" Nothing, my dear," said the old lady, herself a trifle shaken in her cynical attitude. " Just got to wait, while that woman intones on the platform." She began to think aloud under her breath. " *Poison*—that little man! How on earth could he

have . . . I wonder," looking round the room, "They look the last sort of people who . . . That was a funny scene that young doctor made—what did you say his name was?"

"Shorthouse," said Rachel. "I can't think ——"

"Do you know who the young woman was who was holding his hand?"

"Holding his *hand?*"

"Yes. When he got out of the way. That dark creature with the eyebrows."

"Oh, *then,* you mean." Rachel gave a violent shudder as the scene came back to her for the fiftieth time in three minutes. "That was Marion Baddeley, Dr. Shorthouse's dispenser. She's supposed to be . . . supposed to be . . ."

"Quite so," Miss Lydia agreed, looking at the girl in question, whose face still retained an expression of fierce possessiveness. "And is Dr. Shorthouse supposed to be, too?"

"I don't know," said Rachel. "I . . . People like him a good deal, some of them. But I don't know anything really. He's married."

"Humph," said Miss Lydia. "What for?"

"Safety," a man who had moved into Tony's vacant seat said suddenly. By now the first faint whisperings had swelled into a general murmur, and other beside Miss Lydia appeared to find relief in conversation, even if it were only scandal. He drew his chair a little nearer, and added: "Shorthouse has an appalling gift for collecting women, and if he hadn't some tie in the background he'd never be free of them."

"He has an eye, I can see," said Miss Lydia.

"I wouldn't let *my* wife within a mile of him, I can tell you," the man said "—if I'd got one. Mark you, I'm not saying it's all the man's fault. I don't like him; he's a bounder, when all's said and done. But with that yellow head of his, and the way the women go for him, he'd have to be all the saints rolled into one to escape 'em. Secretaries! He could have a whole houseful of secretaries, just for the asking. And if the fellow *doesn't* ask, they're ready to scratch his eyes out. That woman with the glasses—Miss Longman—*she* was all over him at one time. And look at her now! Practically accuses him of tampering with the poor feller's drink."

"Yes . . . Mr. Cayley has a very beautiful wife," Miss Lydia said after a pause.

"Auntie, don't!" Rachel urged in the lowest possible whisper. She felt cold and sick. "He *screamed* so."

Slightly ashamed of her own roving thoughts, Miss Lydia herself fell silent; but the man beside her, not at all put off, continued to talk about Mrs. Cayley and her beauty. It was fairly obvious that at some time or other he must have been hard hit himself.

"And all that," he concluded by saying, "run to waste on a little squit of a fellow——" Here sudden recollection of what had just happened to Mrs. Cayley's husband reached him, and he too fell silent and rather shame-faced. On the platform Mrs. Fremantle rose, and in minatory tones ordered

the assembly to be silent and listen while Sir Arthur Dawlish told them of one of the eugenist experiments that had been made in his own laboratories.

They were silent, at least; and possibly they listened. At any rate Sir Arthur Dawlish did his best, by telling them of experiments on rats and monkeys, to keep their thoughts from the terrible experiment which a man was undergoing in the next room. But it must have been an uphill task for him, as the minutes dragged slowly by, and no word came from the doctors.

"I can't stand it," Rachel whispered. "Why do the police take so *long* coming?"

"They're probably there—with him," Miss Lydia answered in the same tone, and the girl shuddered and was silent.

At long last the door opened, and a man in the uniform of a police sergeant strode in. As it closed the audience had a glimpse of another blue uniform outside. The sergeant came to the dais, and after a few words with the Patroness, addressed the meeting.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I regret to have to inform you that one of your number, Mr. Harold Cayley, has just died—from the effects, the doctors suspect, of poison. I need not tell you that this is a very serious matter, particularly as it seems probable that the unfortunate gentleman took his fatal dose while he was present at this meeting. I regret to have to cause you inconvenience, but in view of the circumstances I should like to have a few words with anyone who conversed with Mr. Cayley

in the course of the evening. The rest of you may go, but I should be obliged if you would leave your names and addresses with the constable at the door."

"Look in that glass!" the high voice of the woman in pince-nez said, before anyone had had time to move. The sergeant, rather taken aback, turned to Mrs. Fremantle with lifted eyebrows.

"Be silent, please!" said that lady. "I have here," she said to the sergeant, "the glass from which Mr. Cayley is said to have drunk. It may be of value to you."

"It is!" the woman cried. "I saw Dr. Shorthouse put something ——"

"Hush, please!" the sergeant said authoritatively. "I shall take the statement of anyone who has anything to say, privately. Sit down, please, miss. And will those of you who have nothing to say please go." The audience, which had been sitting like mesmerised rabbits, began to struggle to its feet; but a large proportion, fifty or more, remained in their chairs.

"He can't possibly have talked to all those," Miss Lydia said scornfully. "It's morbid curiosity, that's what it is. I suppose I shall have to stay, as I did ask the poor thing to find Martin for me; but you'd better get away, my dear. It's no place for you."

"I can't go," Rachel said miserably. "I had—quite a talk with him. He wanted to know where Leah—Mrs. Cayley—was."

By this time all had gone except those who had remained seated, and the sergeant, surveying their numbers, seemed to be of Miss Lydia's opinion, for

he looked round with something of a sardonic smile.

"You will wish," Mrs. Fremantle addressed him, "to take your statements in a smaller room. I will put mine at your disposal, if you will come this way. Miss Longman!" She beckoned to the girl who had attacked Dr. Shorthouse.

"I beg your pardon," Miss Lydia interrupted, "but my niece and I have a long way to go, and it's very late. I have no information that can assist the police in any way, and I should be glad if they would take our statements and let us go."

"Your statements will be taken in strict order of importance," Mrs. Fremantle said in a freezing tone. "Come, sir."

"Nonsense!" Miss Lydia said. "You don't want to keep people here all night who've nothing to say. I want to get my niece home; this is no place for a girl."

"This is a question of public policy," Mrs. Fremantle said, a light of battle beginning to appear in her eyes. "Kindly await your turn." A bubble of protest began in the hall.

"There, that'll do," said the sergeant. "There's no need to be pernickety about it, ma'am. I'll see these ladies first, as they're anxious to be gone; and then anybody who feels they've nothing particular to tell, just a word or two, perhaps in passing. I've a room all fixed up, ma'am; I needn't trouble you, if you'll just wait awhile till I can have a word with you. And you, miss"—he turned to Miss Longman, and spoke in a different tone—"I'd be obliged for you to tell *me* whatever it is you have to tell,

before anyone else hears it. This way, if you please, ma'am."

Taking the glass from the Patroness's hand, and leaving her speechless with astonishment on her throne, he ushered Rachel and her great-aunt through the lobby, which appeared to Rachel's overstrung mind to be swarming with policeman, into a little room in which yet another policeman sat at a table with a note-book. The sergeant heard Miss Lydia's story of her conversation with Cayley, and nodded his head without speaking. To Rachel, however, he put a question or two.

"And where was Mrs. Cayley?"

"I don't know. She hadn't come."

"But she came later, didn't she?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"No-no. With Sir Eric Pennell."

For a moment the sergeant looked like continuing his questions, but appeared to change his mind, and dismissed them. As they crossed the lobby, Tony, looking white and frightened, joined them.

"Your car's here," he said to his aunt. "Will you take Ray home with you, if you don't mind. I've got to wait a bit. My God! It was awful, poor fellow."

Behind them a policeman advanced to seek another victim, but was met half-way by a lady who burst indignantly out of the main hall.

"I won't stay there a minute longer!" she said, and at the sound of her voice, the sergeant came out of his hiding-place. "I'm not going to be ques-

tioned by that woman as though I were a pick-pocket! Asking us all what we'd said to poor Mr. Cayley, and whether he got on with his wife, and who knew anything about their relations, and I don't know what! It isn't decent, and I won't stand it! "

The sergeant turned a resigned face on his subordinate. " We'd best have the old woman in," he murmured, " or she'll be setting the whole place by the ears. Go and get her, will you, Scanlon? If you don't mind waiting a few minutes, ma'am . . . " to the other.

" Wish you joy of her," the constable said in his ear. " I had to tell her her rear-light was out, only last week, and—holy Moses, talk about a tongue! "

Chapter IV

FIRST POLICEMAN

Mrs. Fremantle, whatever defects she may have had, did not suffer from nervousness. She swept into the little room as if to a public meeting, ported her helm rapidly, and settling herself with some difficulty in a not over-roomy chair, addressed the sergeant.

"I am sure," she said, "you will not want to waste time on this unfortunate business, and I shall therefore briefly give you the information I have collected. It is not at all clear who had the opportunity of tampering with Mr. Cayley's lemonade. It was passed to him from the buffet by a young man named Piggott, who seems regrettably uncertain what he did or did not see subsequently. Mr. Cayley then sipped his drink in the presence of Miss Walsey-Molland and Mrs. Schalz, to whom he made some critical comment on the contents, but what I have been unable exactly to ascertain. He then laid it aside for some little while, but on his return Miss Longman saw him drop in it a pill or similar object obtained from Dr. Shorthouse. Piggott, she says, was also present; but Piggott himself professes he is unable to recollect seeing anything of the kind. This, of course, is absurd. With regard to the motive, I have been making enquiries about Mr. Cayley's relations with his wife, and ——"

"One moment, ma'am," the sergeant interrupted. "I'd rather just hear what you saw yourself, if you don't mind."

"What I saw myself, this evening," Mrs. Fremantle said majestically, "is of comparatively slight importance. I had very little conversation with Mr. Cayley. What is more important is what others have told me about his relations ——"

"Quite so, ma'am," the sergeant said wearily. "But if you don't mind, I'd rather get those direct from the parties concerned."

"But you won't get them, sergeant!" Mrs. Fremantle explained triumphantly. "Your uniform will put them off. When I was working with my dear husband at Fremantle House—in the East End, you know—we *always* found that we had to interview the bad characters ourselves and not let the police near them. The criminal classes regard you as their worst foes, you know; and I'm afraid I must say it's partly due to your ridiculous methods. You *frighten* them; you don't win their confidence. It needs a really sympathetic enquirer, one who understands their psychology, to get at the truth in these cases."

"Quite so," the sergeant said again. "But this isn't the East End, and I'm not looking for sneak-thieves. I'd be glad if you'd tell me, ma'am, just what it was you yourself saw, without bothering about anyone else. And be as quick as you can, please; we've no time to waste."

This was exactly what Mrs. Fremantle was most unwilling to do; but eventually, through a mass of

verbiage, and several lecturettes on the correct method of conducting an enquiry, the sergeant elicited that the late Mr. Cayley had asked her at what time the lecture was going to start, and whether the lecturer was as much of a crank as the rest of them. "I told him, of course," said Mrs. Fremantle, "that *I* had personally selected Sir Arthur Dawlish from a full list sent me by the Eugenics Enquiry Bureau, and that he could reply upon a sane and balanced treatment of the subject!"

"Yes. Where was Mr. Cayley sitting—during the meeting?" the sergeant wanted to know.

Mrs. Fremantle told him.

"And Mrs. Cayley?"

"By the door." Further enquiries seemed to make it clear that, from the time at which Leah Cayley had arrived, she had not been in communication with her husband; and, with this information secured, the sergeant, not without some difficulty, dismissed the lady. At the door she turned and fired a parting shot.

"Please be very careful of that glass, and return it to me the moment you have finished with it. It formed part of Mr. Fremantle's collection, and it is valuable." And with that she was gone.

"She'll go back in there and be at it again," Constable Scanlon prophesied.

"No, she won't," the sergeant said. "I've put Tomkins at the door. Now, then, let's get a move on. I want to have something to show the Yard if they take it over. Go and get that woman who was talking about the glass."

Miss Mary Longman's story was simple, if a trifle pointed by rancour. She had seen Harold Cayley put down his glass of lemonade, and go up to Dr. Shorthouse, who after some conversation took something out of his pocket and gave it to him. Cayley returned to his seat, and dropped the substance into his glass. At the end of the lecture he drank it off, and complained to a neighbour of the bitter taste. Within half an hour he had fallen in his fatal seizure. Then, she said, Dr. Shorthouse had come back, " looking madly frightened," and had deliberately tried to knock over the table on which the glass stood. " He spilt some of it," Miss Longman said. " But I caught it before he'd spilt it all, and I wouldn't let him take it away."

" You don't like Dr. Shorthouse? " the sergeant suggested.

" *I've* nothing against him," Miss Longman said with pursed lips. " But others have. You ask any of the men—especially those with wives."

" Well, I shouldn't do it yourself, if I were you," the sergeant advised. " In cases like this, a still tongue's the best protection for yourself, miss. . . . There's spite, if ever I saw it," he said to the constable when she had gone. " We'd best find out a bit about this woman. Trouble about this sort of thing is, it takes you into a line of country you don't know. If it was a knifing in a Circus, we'd know all about the parties—but poison in a Garden Suburb! You don't know who to keep your eye on."

" 'Spose there's no doubt it was poison? " the constable asked.

"There'll be a post-mortem, of course," said the sergeant. "But, from what the doctors say, I shouldn't think there was a shadow of a doubt. Strychnine, it seems; and a whole skinful of it, poor fellow. Of course it may have been suicide."

"Shouldn't a thought it of Mr. Cayley," the constable said. "Fussy little chap he was, always worrying about somebody's dog barking or his trees overhanging, and that sort of thing. That kind lasts longest, as a rule. Do you want this Dr. Shorthouse next?"

"No," said the sergeant, after thinking it over. "If he has been up to any funny stuff, he may as well have time to cool his heels a bit. He's safe enough in there with Roberts. We'll have some more of these people who've got nothing to say."

* * * * * * *

"We'll have Shorthouse now," he said, after a long time spent in useless examination. Beyond the fact that Mr. Cayley had been in a somewhat irritable mood, nobody appeared to know anything which could throw light on his sudden end. And as to his mood, he was an irritable man by nature. "Don't suppose even that Mrs. Fremantle would give a man strychnine because he was a bit grumpy," the sergeant reflected sadly. It was long past midnight, and he had been called out again after a long day.

The constable returned with Dr. Shorthouse, who dropped into a chair as if he were dead-beat. He was still very white, and the sergeant noticed that his lips were dry and his hands shaking. However

. . . he had just seen a man die of strychnine poisoning. . . .

"Dr. Shorthouse," he began, "will you tell me just what you know of Mr. Cayley's death."

"I don't know anything, I'm afraid," Shorthouse said. "You don't mean in there, I suppose? You were there yourself. I wasn't in the room when he was taken ill, and I hardly saw him all the evening."

"You didn't have any conversation with him?" the sergeant asked.

"No, I don't think so."

"Sure?"

"Yes—I ——" Something, either in the sergeant's expression or the air of the room, appeared to warn the young doctor that he had said the wrong thing. He put his hand over his eyes, and appeared to be thinking. "No . . . I'm sorry . . . I believe I did. Yes . . . He said he wasn't feeling well, and asked me to give him a pick-me-up."

"And you did?"

"Yes."

"Did he take it?"

"I don't know. I didn't wait to see."

"Curious," said the sergeant, "you should have forgotten that so soon."

"I'm sorry. You must excuse me. It's one o'clock, and I'm dead to the world."

"I understand," said the sergeant, making a note, "that you weren't the deceased's medical attendant?"

"Yes, I was!"

"I thought Dr. Midhurst ——"

"Dr. Midhurst may have been, for all I know. I don't know who his doctor was, before he came to me."

"How long ago was that?"

"About a week."

"A week! Didn't you make any enquiries? I understand you medical gentlemen are very particular about not taking each other's patients."

"I don't know about that," said Shorthouse. "We've got to live. If nobody ever changed their doctor, the young men might as well shut up shop. I took it for granted Mr. Cayley'd made the ordinary notifications."

"You didn't ask him?"

"No! I thought he was old enough to know what he ought to do."

"This pick-me-up," said the sergeant. "What was it?"

"Oh," said Shorthouse, staring hard at him, "an ordinary sort of pick-me-up. I use it for lots of my patients."

"Have you got the prescription on you?"

"No. I don't carry prescriptions. I . . . I daresay I could remember it, if you want it." The sergeant passed pencil and paper to him, and he scribbled some hieroglyphics with a hand that trembled a good deal.

"You'll have to tell me what this means, sir. I'm not a chemist. What's that?" Shorthouse interpreted the sign. "And this? And this?"

"Strychnine," Shorthouse said slowly. "One-

fortieth of a grain."

"Oh! Is that—a regular dose?"

"Yes, quite. Very usual."

"Did you make up the prescription yourself?"

"Yes."

"Before you came out?"

"Yes. I always carry some made up. People often ask me for a pick-me-up at affairs like this."

"Dr. Shorthouse, you don't think you may have—made an error in making it up?"

"No," said Shorthouse, shifting his eyes uneasily.

"Have you the others on you?"

"What others?"

"The other pills you made up, to take out with you."

"No. This was the last."

"Who did you give the others to?"

"The others? I hadn't. . . . Did I say the last? I meant it was the only one."

"You went out, with *only one* pill made up?"

"Yes," said Shorthouse.

At this point, the door of the room opened, and Dr. Midhurst looked in.

"Excuse me, sergeant," he said; "but do you want me any more? They have taken poor Cayley's body to the station, and as to what he was doing in the evening, I'm afraid I can't help you, for I didn't talk to him at all. So, unless you want me——"

"I don't think I need keep you, doctor," said the sergeant, "and thank you very much for all you've done. I'm getting Dr. Shorthouse to go along with me to the station"—at this the man in the chair gave

a sudden start. "There's just one thing I'd like to ask you. About Mr. Cayley having changed his doctor ——"

Dr. Midhurst drew himself up, and looked distinctly annoyed. "As to that, sergeant," he said, "I am afraid I cannot help you, for this is the first I have heard of it; and, frankly, if Dr. Shorthouse will excuse me, I find it very difficult to believe. I had attended Mr. Cayley for ten years, and he was exceedingly unlikely to change."

"He changed," Shorthouse said angrily, "because he thought your methods out-of-date."

"Excuse me," the sergeant said, "I thought you said you didn't know anything about his previous doctor."

"I said I didn't know his name," Shorthouse retorted wearily. "I didn't say I knew nothing about him. I did. Cayley told me quite a lot," he added with meaning.

"I cannot believe it," Dr. Midhurst repeated. "But this is no time for a dispute. If you don't want me, sergeant, I will take Mrs. Cayley home in my car. I am afraid this must have been a great strain on her."

"Mrs. Cayley's gone, sir," the constable said with the shadow of a grin. "Went off quite a while ago with that young gentleman who's a Bart, in his car."

"Ah, yes, Sir Eric Pennell," Dr. Midhurst said, while a look of beneficence slowly overspread his face. "Youth to youth, you know. I trust the young man is a careful driver. Well, if you're go-

ing to the station, Shorthouse, I'll just let your wife know where you are. It's very late, and wives worry so easily. It's no trouble to me."

"Thanks," Shorthouse muttered, with anything but thankfulness in his tone. With a comprehensive smile, Dr. Midhurst departed.

"Look here," said Shorthouse, "what are you taking me to the station for? I've not done anything."

"I just want you to come along and make your statement to the inspector in charge, sir," the sergeant said smoothly. "About those pills, he'll want to know; and if you were Mr. Cayley's medical attendant, he'll probably want to know about his health. You've got the chief information bearing on this case, you know, sir."

"And suppose I say I won't? Suppose I say my head's going round and round and I want to get to bed?"

"Well," said the sergeant, "we could take you, sir, of course. But I shouldn't like to do it, especially if you're not feeling well." They measured each other with their eyes for a moment.

"Oh, very well," said Shorthouse at last, shrugging his shoulders. "I've nothing else to say, but if you really want me—— But if you're going to keep me up all night, you might let me have a drink."

The sergeant handed him a flask, which he seized, and gulped greedily. While he drank, the sergeant gave a few final instructions to the constable, and then rose to his feet. "We'll be getting along now,

sir," he said, and led the way out of the room. Shorthouse followed him, staggering slightly as he walked. As they climbed into the police car that stood outside the gates, a woman's voice called from the darkness, " Dr. Shorthouse! "

" That you, Marion? " Shorthouse said, in a voice slightly thickened with raw spirit. " I've got to go along to the station. See you to-morrow some time. Good night."

" Who was that, sir? " the sergeant asked.

" Miss Baddeley," Shorthouse answered as he dropped into the cushions. " My dispenser."

* * * * * * *

Meanwhile, in the intellectual boarding-house kept by the Misses Forrester in Coburn Rise, Tony Redford tossed from side to side, utterly unable to sleep. Picture after picture of Harold Cayley fighting and writhing for his life came before him; and again, irrelevantly, visions of Mrs. Fremantle dragooning the meeting, and Dr. Midhurst, frock-coated and impressive, drawing out his stethoscope as if he had been attending an ordinary bedside. Last came an odd little recollection of a small room into which he had stumbled when he went to get a breath of air just after Cayley had died. It was in darkness, but a lamp from the street shone in at the unshuttered window, and showed a dark figure sitting sprawled across a table, with its head buried on its arms.

" Oh! I beg your pardon! " Tony gasped. " I didn't know there was anyone here. Oh! " The figure had lifted its head, and stared at him with the eyes of Martin Delahaye in a dazed face. " I say!

Martin! Is anything the matter? Do you want anything?"

"No, I don't! Go away."

"But, I say, Martin, is anything up? Are you seedy?"

"No . . . I don't know . . . Oh, for Christ's sake go away!" An unmistakable sob cut through the anger in his voice, and Tony, perplexed, crept out again.

"Poor old chap," he thought, "he must have a regular belly-buster. I'm glad my tummy doesn't do the dirty on me like that. I don't wonder Ray's worried about him."

But, as he recollected the incident at four in the morning, another thought came to him. "I say! I thought Ray said Martin had gone home, hours ago. I wonder what he was doing hanging about there still. Perhaps he was too bad to move, poor devil. I might have offered him a lift, or a drink, or something. I am the fool of the world!" And Tony turned his pillow and banged it angrily as if it were responsible for the intelligence of the head which lay on it.

Chapter V

SECOND AND THIRD POLICEMAN

"Well that seems pretty definite," Detective-Inspector Calcott of Scotland Yard said to Mr. Walrond, the divisional superintendent, as they sat in the latter's room at the Medstead station two days after Cayley's death. He had just been reading the analyst's report of the post-mortem. "Fifteen grains, poor chap! Enough to kiss most of us pretty quickly. And now, the question is, how did it get inside him?"

The superintendent shook his head to indicate complete lack of knowledge. He was a tall melancholy man with weeping moustaches, who was well-known throughout the police forces for his complete refusal to believe that any criminal could ever be caught or any crime solved. Neither statistics nor personal success had any effect on this conviction; he approached every new case with an absolute lack of hope. "Might have been suicide, I suppose," he said at last.

"Don't think it's likely, do you?" the Scotland Yard man said. He was a short, cheerful, round-faced fellow, as buoyant as the other was gloomy. "I know if I were going to commit suicide, I shouldn't choose strychnine. Beastly way to die, when all's said and done."

"I wouldn't drink salts of lemon, either," said the

superintendent. "But they do. Lots of 'em. Maybe they don't know what it's going to be like."

"But strychnine! You can read it all up in any encyclopaedia, and it's enough to put you off forever."

"Maybe he hadn't got an encyclopaedia."

"Well, of course, it's possible he hadn't. So you're inclined to think it was suicide, eh?"

The superintendent shook his head again. "Oh, no, I shouldn't say *that*," he said. "To my mind, Mr. Cayley was the last person in the world to take his own life."

"Oh, you think that, do you? Why?"

"He wasn't the type. He was a bit crotchety, they say; but that's all."

"Who was he? What was he like? What did he do?"

"Name," said the superintendent in a funeral voice, "Harold James Cayley. Age, forty-seven. Occupation, head cashier of the Medstead branch of the Capital and Counties Bank. Address, 23 Willink Lane, Medstead Garden Suburb: a house containing four bed- and two sitting-rooms, and a small garden. Habits, regular. Recreations, gardening and wireless."

"Well, go on. Goodness, man, I'm not an agent for *Who's Who!* Tell me what he was *like*."

"Height," said the superintendent obediently, "five feet seven. Hair, sandy, rather thin on top——"

"All right, all right. I've seen the photographs. What was *he* like, himself? Did he steal the bank's

cash, for instance?"

"I should say it was highly improbable. He was a most regular and valuable servant, they say, though somewhat lacking in initiative. He was in comfortable circumstances, considering his expenditure. He was a member of the Literary Institute, had served on its committee, and frequently attended its meetings. He spoke occasionally, generally on proportional representation. He was keenly interested in wireless, and was consulted about the Institute's wireless installation. He had just returned from his annual holiday in Belgium a week before his death. Insured with the *Daily Express*."

Inspector Calcott sighed. "*That* doesn't sound suicidal," he said. "Just an ordinary average citizen. What about his wife?"

"Mrs. Cayley is generally considered good-looking," said the superintendent.

"Heavens, Walrond, I don't need you to tell me that! It stares you in the face, even in a newspaper photograph. Tell me, had she other admirers?"

"Plenty, as far as I have made enquiries."

"Any affairs? You know what I mean."

"I have not heard of any," said the superintendent, "sufficiently serious to throw any light on this situation. Mrs. Cayley, though very handsome, did not incline her favours in any special direction."

"She let 'em all come, in fact. You're not being awfully helpful, Walrond. Why did she marry Cayley?"

"I have not ascertained. It is generally believed that she came from some Midland town, that she

was a typist there, and married Mr. Cayley principally because he offered her a London life. She was considerably younger than her husband; I understand she is still under thirty."

"He carried off the belle of Melton Mowbray, eh? I wonder if she found the Garden Suburb exciting. Did they get on well together, do you know?"

"I think, not very well. They had not many tastes in common. Mrs. Cayley does not appear interested in proportional representation, and Mr. Cayley does not—did not dance and was not very willing to spend money. They bickered a good deal, if I may say so, but I can find no trace of any serious quarrel. The chief trouble was that Mrs. Cayley thought him hypochondriacal."

"Oh! And was he?"

"Very much so." For the first time the superintendent showed a faint flicker of interest. "He spent half his time trying one patent thing after another. Pounds and pounds it must have cost him."

"Anything really the matter?"

"Not a thing, Midhurst says, bar what he put in his stomach himself. He'd never have needed to miss a day at the bank if it hadn't been for his dosing away. He'd never go to an evening party, like that one where he met his death, without he'd swallow half-a-dozen things in the course of the evening."

"And this habit of his was pretty well-known?"

"Oh, very. That old lady they call the Patroness, she's been on at me twice telling me how he must

have taken an extra bit by accident and that caused his death."

Calcott laughed. " We can leave accident out of account, I think. People don't take four or five hundred times the ordinary amount, by accident. Nor do packets of strychnine get themselves casually dropped into lemonade glasses. What about that glass of lemonade, by the way? "

" I've had it looked at," the superintendent said. " There was hardly any left. That Dr. Shorthouse nearly spilt the lot. But the analyst says, as far as he can see, there was more strychnine in it than he said there was."

" Oh, was there? How much more? "

" Maybe up to a quarter of a grain."

" Umph! That's not a fatal dose, except in unusual cases. I suppose there's no chance of an error? That there was more than that in it, I mean. But no—there couldn't have been sixty times the amount."

" Besides," the superintendent said, " you couldn't take fifteen grains of the stuff in lemonade, and not notice it. The taste 'ud knock you down."

" True. It can't be a case of mere mis-measuring. Whoever gave him that dose, gave it to kill. But who *was* it? "

" Well, there you have me. Dr. Shorthouse certainly tried to knock it over, and he certainly acted queerly at the station, and that's all there is to it."

" Queerly? How? "

" Jumpy. As if he was all on edge. And contradicting himself time and again, as if he hadn't

made up quite what he meant to say."

"What sort of a fellow is he? No, don't start your cataloguing again. I want to know something about him."

"He's been here about four years," said the superintendent with something of a sigh. "Came from Birmingham or somewhere near. He's a very new-fangled type of doctor, with a bit of psychoanalysis about him; does a good deal of work among women."

"Illegal, eh?"

"Not that I've ever known. Of course, it's been hinted at; but if he does, he's pretty careful. He'd need to be; any trouble of that sort would send him down in a brace of shakes."

"Unpopular?"

"Too popular, I'd say," said the superintendent; "and not with the right people. The young ones go to him, and some of the old women, and they say he's very clever. But the men don't like him, say he's a bit not quite, nor the old residents. And some of the women—my hat, you should hear 'em! This Miss Longman, now, she's one of 'em."

"Who is she?"

"Used to be companion to old Lady Whitaker, who died. Now she's secretary to Mrs. Fremantle. Lady Whitaker used to have Shorthouse to attend her, and for a while they were both of them all over him. Nothing too good for him, and all that. Then something happened—I don't know what—and ever since Miss Longman's been out for Shorthouse's blood. It was bad luck for him she was

sitting next when he made his break, and that's a fact."

"Did Cayley get on with him?"

"Well, that I don't know, either. They'd had some sharp words, some time ago. Mr. Cayley didn't like anybody making too free with his wife. But I'm told it had blown over. Of course, things like that rankle, sometimes, and Mr. Cayley's short with his tongue when he likes. And it's queer, however you look at it, the way he carried on."

"Then you're inclined to think he may be the man we're after?"

"Oh, no," said the superintendent. "I wouldn't say that at all. Of course, he might; but then again he might not. The trouble is, you see, Mr. Calcott, that with crimes of this sort, we've nothing to go on. We don't know the parties; if they quarrel they keep it to themselves and don't blackguard each other to the public streets; and who's to know *what's* in their minds? There's nothing worse, if you ask me, than a murder in the middle classes; it's like a murder in the fog."

"I see," the Inspector sighed. "Well, Walrond, thanks so much for brightening me. You've just conclusively proved that we can't possibly solve this murder—and now I've got to set out to solve it. Let me have that list you've got of the people who were there, will you? I suppose I've just got to go around questioning everybody who was within a mile till I get hold of something."

"And meanwhile," said the superintendent, "whoever's the guilty party gets plenty of time to

destroy all the evidence and walk off to his cottage in the country. That's another thing about these sort of people. You can't lock 'em up and leave 'em to cool their heels and think things out, or there's the Hades of a row. They're not much to look at themselves, but they've everyone of 'em got relations in the Government or the Bank of England or somewhere like that."

"Even typists from the Midlands?" the inspector smiled.

"Lord bless you, they're worse than the lot. *They've* got Labour M.P.s, half of them, and there's such a fuss, if you hold one of 'em a couple of hours, that you wish you'd never been born."

"You be careful, Walrond. Your optimism will get you into trouble, one of these days, my boy. Well, so long."

Chapter VI

ENTRACTE IN SUBURBIA

Smiling a little to himself at his associate's gloom, Inspector Calcott walked out of the Medstead Police Station, and began to cross the road. His mind being occupied with this new case, he was not more than half attentive to the traffic, and, but that his ears were less oblivious than his eyes, he would have been knocked down by a two-seater which came flying round a corner at a pace considerably more than unwise. An undignified leap placed the inspector in safety, while the car skidded across the road as its driver jammed on the brakes, and executed a complicated waddle before it finally came to rest against the curb. Inspector Calcott, seething with public as well as private indignation, strode wrathfully up to its occupant, a slight, fair-haired man with a worried look in his eyes.

"What do you think you're doing, sir?" he demanded. "That's no speed to take a corner at. You all but killed me."

"I sounded my horn," the driver said rather surlily. There was a slight thickness in his speech and a blurred look in his eyes which made the inspector turn a sudden sharp glance at him. "I'm in a hurry. Got to get to a case—urgent."

"That's no excuse for making new ambulance cases on the way," Calcott retorted. "You were driving very dangerously."

"Well, I'm sorry," the man said; "but I haven't made any ambulance cases. I didn't touch you. Will you let me get on, please?"

"I'll have to have your name and address, sir," Calcott, now all policeman, persisted. "This is a case for a summons." He showed his police badge.

With an impatient exclamation, the man in the car took out his pocket-book and flipped a visiting-card at the inspector. "There you are, then," he said. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I must be off." And, without waiting for permission, he slipped into gear, and shot down the hill, zigzagging slightly in his course.

The Inspector stood on the footpath, thoughtfully scanning the card he had caught. It bore the name "W. J. Shorthouse, M.D." "So that's the chap," he thought. "And, unless I'm much mistaken, he's had one over the eight already, at three in the afternoon. That looks rather. . . . No, on second thoughts it doesn't look anything. The fellow's had a pretty stiff gruelling, by all accounts, and he's pretty clearly the nervous kind that goes to pieces quickly. All the same, I'm sorry for his patients this afternoon." He paused and reflected. "Not much point in trying to interview Dr. Shorthouse now. I think—I'll get along and have a look at the bereaved widow."

The garden of 23, Willink Lane, bore witness to the truth of the superintendent's researches into the habits of the late Mr. Cayley. A beautifully-trimmed grass plot stretched either side of a newly-gravelled path; a row of sunflowers bordered the

fence, and the side-beds were glowing with sweet-peas, roses, and late annuals. Nothing was out of place save one or two flowers which had faded since the death of their owner, and would obviously have been clipped if he had lived. A sharp-featured maid opened the door, and took the inspector's card with every sign of interest. Calcott noted her as a possibly useful source of information, and asked for Mrs. Cayley. She was resting, he was told; but his card should be taken up. As he passed through the hall, he saw a huge sheaf of roses lying on the table, and took instantaneous note of the card which lay on them. It bore the name, "Sir Eric Pennell." "Who's he?" the inspector wondered. He stepped into the drawing-room, which had the usual Garden Suburb bright chintzes and white bookcases filled neatly with literature of an intellectual type, and waited for its mistress.

Inspector Calcott was not susceptible to the "classical" type of beauty. His own wife was a brown-haired, slender girl with a snub nose and bright eyes in a freckled face, and he was wont to declare, quite truthfully, that she entirely satisfied his ideal of feminine good looks. He therefore surveyed Leah Cayley's face without the slightest stirring of the pulses. But, as a matter of cold judgment, he was compelled, like Miss Lydia before him, to a profound appreciation. This, whether it came from the Midlands or anywhere else, and whatever it had been doing before Harold Cayley found it, was the genuine article, that perfection of mould and colouring which painters ever since—dash it all,

were there painters in ancient Greece, and if so, who were they?—well, since whoever they were, had fought to put on canvas.

"This," Calcott reflected, "is enough to provide motive and to spare for a hundred murders. But," he added to himself, after a quick penetrating glance at the lovely impressive face with its deep grey eyes which showed hardly any sign of emotion, "I'm not sure whether they'd get any change out of it. She's not breaking her heart over our poor friend, anyway. I wish I knew something about the Pennell fellow."

Leah Cayley's grief for her departed husband, when she came to express it, was decorous, if not excessive. She inclined her head with a beautiful grace when Calcott opened with an expression of conventional sympathy, and kept it bowed while he was explaining the circumstances of Cayley's death. When he turned to asking questions about his life, she raised it and looked up at him with eyes in which there was an absorbed attention, but no helpful contribution. No, she could conceive no reason why Mr. Cayley should have committed suicide. (Her voice puzzled Calcott; it was soft, level and gentle, but was there not just a shade too much care in her pronunciation?) He was not unhappy, not in the least. He was not worried, nor had he shown any change in his manner lately. He was not ill; he was sometimes a little bothered about his health. "But I don't think even he took it seriously," said Mrs. Cayley, with just the faintest touch of contempt.

"Didn't play cards, or bet, or anything that might

have got him into difficulties?"

No, nothing that Mrs. Cayley knew of. She implied that it was inconceivable and uninteresting.

"Money affairs all right?" the inspector asked; and learned, with a rather surprising amount of detail, that they were. He had saved—and he heard how much; he was insured—and the amount was carefully explained to him.

"She's interested in that, all right," he reflected. "Made sure he wasn't going to leave her stranded. Question is, could she have been flying after something bigger?"

"Excuse me putting the question, madam," he asked at last, "but you never heard of your husband having any enemies?"

"Enemies? No." She had become listless again.

"Or quarrels?"

"No, I don't think so."

"He didn't—ever object to any person that you know of?"

"He sometimes got cross with people, if that is what you mean."

"With others—or with yourself?"

"With me?" Leah Cayley gazed at him. "We sometimes squabbled, like most people. My husband didn't always like my going out without him. But he knew he wouldn't go, so I had to. It wasn't anything much. A bit of snapping, sometimes."

"But no serious quarrel with anyone?"

"No."

Calcott tried again. "Why did your husband change his doctor?"

"I don't know," Mrs. Cayley said. "I was surprised he hadn't changed before. I think he thought Dr. Midhurst was out of date."

"Did you approve of the change?"

"He didn't ask me. I suppose Dr. Shorthouse is more up-to-date. He's younger, and people say he's very clever."

"Does Dr. Shorthouse attend you also?"

"He doesn't need to. I'm never ill," said Leah Cayley, and suppressed a yawn. The inspector took the hint, and departed, first, however, obtaining permission to interview the servant-girl.

There he found an intense willingness to communicate, but very little information, when the chaff had been sifted out. The girl, who belonged to a sharp ferrety type which he cordially detested, clearly disliked both her master and her mistress, the former because he was pernickety in the house and close with his cash, and the latter from some unexplained reason, which might have been simple jealousy of her looks, or resentment from lack of confidence, or a dozen other things. Harold Cayley, she made it plain, was the sort of little squit of a man who deserved to be cuckolded, and Leah Cayley the kind of woman who might be expected to lend herself to it. But when the inspector sharply bade her come down from innuendo to facts, she could produce nothing more than that "the mistress was always going out alone with men of all sorts," and that lately she'd been a good few times with the

same one at nights. He'd brought her back in a taxi, and then walked her up and down a long time before saying good-night, the maid added, giving to the word, " good night," an expression which suggested a multitude of sins.

" Did she know who the gentleman was? " Calcott asked.

No, she didn't, not to swear to his name. He was a tall, thin gentleman, and she'd know him again, she was certain. One mention of Shorthouse's name, Calcott felt sure, and she would have gaily identified him. And, as he himself thought it not improbable that the cavalier had been Shorthouse, he refrained from giving her the lead, and merely made an enquiry about the gentleman whose card was in the hall. *He'd* only been once or twice, the maid said eagerly, and in a big car too. " He's a *gentleman,*" she added with emphasis. " Gentleman," Calcott felt, in the strictly financial sense. And with that he took his departure, feeling that he would not make much headway until he had interviewed Dr. Shorthouse himself.

As he left the Cayleys' house, wondering whether the agitated doctor would yet have reached home, he realised with annoyance that he had omitted to make a note of his address. It would waste a great deal of time to go back to the station for it, and the Garden Suburb, he remembered, was singularly destitute of telephone boxes. He was looking along the empty road for a helpful passer-by when he observed a large limousine moving gently towards him. He signalled to the chauffeur, and asked him for

Dr. Shorthouse's address, which he obtained with relief, and was moving on, when a head, covered in what he imagined should be called a "toque," protruded itself from the window of the limousine; and a commanding voice said to him, "Here!"

He turned.

"Come *here!*" said the voice. He came, and found himself looking in at the window into the face of a large and impressive lady, who was sitting in the limousine surrounded by rugs and bundles of what appeared to be pamphlets.

"You want Dr. Shorthouse's address?" the lady said.

"Yes, madam."

"What for?" said the lady; and without waiting for an answer, which, indeed, Calcott was not prepared to give, she enquired, "Are you a policeman?"

"I am from Scotland Yard, madam," Calcott said. "I am making a few enquiries ——"

"Yes. That's what I want to talk to you about," said the lady. "Get in here."

"You must excuse me, madam," said Calcott, more amused than anything else. "I'm in rather a hurry. Some other time, perhaps."

"Nonsense!" said the lady. "You won't waste any time. Dr. Shorthouse's house is right away at the other side of the Garden Suburb, and my car will take you there while we talk. I have some very important things to say to you. Please get in at once." She opened the door with a commanding gesture, and Calcott, after a moment's hesitation,

entered. Dr. Shorthouse might not yet have returned, after all; and he was sorely in need of almost any sort of information. The large lady scooped him a small recess among the pamphlets, and he sat down rather uncomfortably on the edge of the seat, while she boomed into the speaking-tube, "Dr. Shorthouse's, Twaddle. And take the long way round. Your name," she said turning back "is ——?"

"Calcott, madam. Inspector Calcott."

"I," said the large lady, "am Mrs. Fremantle. I am the Patroness of the Medstead Literary Institute, and was in the chair at that unfortunate incident the other night. The Institute was, in fact, founded largely through the efforts of my husband and myself. We set it up at the termination of our social work in the East End, which brought us in contact with a large number of different psychological types. Since my husband died, I have continued the work—alone, and in a rather different sphere; but I have on many occasions found my knowledge of human psychology of remarkable service." She paused, and fixed Calcott with her eye, while her hand casually picked up a stout pamphlet on Vivisection, and Calcott wondered what on earth was coming.

"Mr. Calcott," she said impressively, "you are in charge of this case. Arrest Dr. Midhurst!"

"What!" In spite of himself, Calcott felt his jaw drop. This was the last thing he had expected.

"I said," said Mrs. Fremantle, hitting him a smart blow on the knee with the pamphlet on Vivisection, "I said, arrest Dr. Midhurst!"

"But, my dear madam, why?"

"Why? For the murder of Mr. Cayley, of course! I assure you, Mr. Calcott, I know what I am talking about."

"But," said Calcott, collecting his wits, "I understood from the Superintendent that you thought it was an accident."

"It *may* have been an accident," said Mrs. Fremantle. "Someone may have carelessly dropped poison in that poor man's glass. But *they may not.* And if they did not, Mr. Calcott, there was a murderer present, and you had much better arrest him before he has time to escape."

"But why should you say it was *Dr. Midhurst?*" A vision of that bland practitioner, as he met him before the autopsy, came over Calcott and made him chuckle helplessly, but a slap from the pamphlet recalled him to his duties.

"Because of my experience of human nature," Mrs. Fremantle said. "I know old men like Dr. Midhurst, and they are *eaten up* with professional jealousy. Your work, Mr. Calcott, has lain among the lower and criminal classes, who have no standards of professional pride, and you cannot imagine how an insult to his profession preys on a man's mind. My late husband was one of the mildest of men"—and, indeed this was true—"but he could become positively *violent* if anyone spoke uncharitably of social workers. Dr. Midhurst had attended poor Cayley for ten years, and then the foolish man goes and throws him over, without even the courtesy of a notice, for a young upstart like Shorthouse—

hardly even a gentleman! It is enough to make any sensitive professional man into a murderer."

"And so, you think, he *poisoned* him?" Calcott asked.

"What other means would a doctor employ?" Mrs. Fremantle said triumphantly. "My husband wrote a number of articles on the danger of letting the medical profession have such uncontrolled access to poisons. When a medical man does go wrong, Mr. Calcott, he has unlimited opportunity of putting his evil desires into practice. I cannot imagine why you policemen have not put a check to that long ago."

"Yes," said Calcott, a little bewildered. "But what you've been saying applies to any doctor. Dr. Shorthouse ——"

"Only to those who have a *motive,*" Mrs. Fremantle interrupted. "Only the mentally aberrant, and they are a very small proportion of the population, kill without a motive. Now my secretary wants to go about telling people that Dr. Shorthouse killed poor Cayley—but she's a fool, as well as a very unbalanced woman. She doesn't realise that young Shorthouse may have as criminal a mind as you please—but he had every *motive* for keeping his new patient alive. Whereas Dr. Midhurst, as well as losing his patient, had been slighted—insulted in his professional pride. Depend upon it, young man, if it wasn't an accident, *Dr. Midhurst* is the guilty party, and you will regret it all your life if you don't make sure of him!" At this point the car stopped, just in time to save Calcott from another thwack;

and he climbed out, with a hasty word of acknowledgment.

" Now mind you think over what I've told you! " Mrs. Fremantle shouted from the window.

" My hat! I hope all the Suburbanites aren't like that," Calcott thought, as he walked up the path and rang Dr. Shorthouse's bell.

Chapter VII

FIRST MURDERER?

Dr. Shorthouse, said the grimy little maid-of-all-work who opened the door, was in, she thought. She'd go and see. And with a gesture which just missed being the jerk of a thumb she motioned him into a small room which was apparently used as a dump for pictures, books, and household goods that were not supposed to need dusting, and disappeared to make her enquiries. The inspector stood in the middle of the room, clear of a sewing-machine whose lid did not fit, a pile of newspapers, and some pieces of a Meccano set, and mentally the Shorthouse ménage.

Dr. Shorthouse's " villa residence " was not in the Garden Suburb itself, but formed part of a cheaper terrace run up by some enterprising building company for the benefit of those who would live in the Suburb, but could not afford the prices. The houses in it bore an outward resemblance to those in the Suburb, or perhaps " had borne " would be the more correct phrase, for they had now been in existence for some years, and shoddy brickwork overlaid with the roughest of rough-cast, cheap paint, and scamped labour were beginning to show their effect in a general shabbiness. Neither inside nor outside did it appear that either Shorthouse or his landlord had thought of spending any money on doing the house

up. In the hall pieces of plaster had been chipped away, probably by furniture entering, and had never been replaced; the room in which Calcott was now standing had obviously suffered from an inadequate damp-course which had caused its distemper to fade in clouds and patches; and the paint, which presumably had once been white and clean, had quite certainly not been renewed for years. The other plenishings of the home, so far as he could see them, were on a par with the house itself. The carpet was on its last legs, the room most inadequately cleaned, and the maid who had admitted him of the "cheap flitter" type—the kind which lasts at the outside three or four months in any situation. "No money," Calcott reflected to himself, "children"—looking at the pieces of Meccano—"and probably a wife who's a bad manager ——"

At this point—all these reflections had only taken a few seconds—the sound of voices, which must have been going on for some time, penetrated to his consciousness, and he realised that the window was open and that through some other window near by an acrimonious conversation must be floating to his ears. He moved rather nearer to the window.

"I tell you I can't! You seem to think I'm made of money!" was the first thing he heard, spoken in an irritated male voice. There was a sound of a door opening somewhere. "Oh, hell!" the voice went on. "I'll have to go and see him, I suppose." Calcott conjectured that his card had been delivered.

"Well, I don't know what you do with it!" a woman's voice continued, as if there had been no

interruption. Calcott could almost visualise the weak, querulous face that went with it. "You've got patients enough, and you ought to be able to make some of them pay up. How many accounts have you got owing?"

"Oh, God, *I* don't know!"

"Well, you get some of them paid. I tell you I *must* have some money. There's the grocer, and——"

"Oh, Lord, Molly, don't begin again! I'll see what I can do; but I'm fagged out, and there'll be all those brutes coming in at five——"

Calcott turned with a start for which he could have whipped himself. Intent on catching the conversation, he had not observed the entrance of a dark-haired girl in white overalls, who was now standing staring at him under black brows, with a look which Calcott felt was intended to wither him on the spot. She did not speak, even when she saw that he had seen her, but walked straight over to the window and closed it with a pointedness which made words unnecessary. Then, with another glance of contempt, she disappeared through a door at the other end of the room. Calcott cursed himself inwardly. Detectives are bound, by the nature of their trade, to eavesdrop, but they ought not to be caught at it. As he was speculating on the identity of the young woman, the door opened, and Shorthouse himself entered. Calcott studied him with interest. He wanted to get a clear idea of this, at present the only potential suspect in the case.

He saw a tall slender fellow of five-foot ten or

so, with rather sloping shoulders and long nervous hands. Calcott's profession led his eye first to the hands, which trembled slightly as they closed the door. This might have been apprehension—or the remains of the drink which he had observed an hour earlier. But the first characteristic which would have struck any ordinary observer in Dr. Shorthouse was his exceeding fairness. His skin, where the weather had not touched it, had a clear whiteness which a girl would have envied; his head was crowned with a thick crop of yellow hair; and a pair of the most vivid blue eyes Calcott had ever seen were set above his long nose and his wide, sensitive mouth. It was not a handsome face in any technical sense, but even Calcott, little as he liked yellow hair in members of his own sex could easily see that it might be irresistible, particularly if the rather full lips were true indicators of their owner's character. At the moment, however, that owner looked less conquering than defeated; he was soberer, certainly, than he had been at their last meeting; but he seemed wan and exhausted, and the glance he gave his visitor had a distinct touch of apprehension.

"What can I——" he began; and then he stopped and laughed. "Why," he said, "you're the chap who caught me speeding! You don't lose much time, do you? What's in it?"

"It wasn't about that I came to see you, doctor," said the inspector, and watched the cloud settle back on the man's face. "I wanted to have a few words with you about Mr. Cayley's death." Did Shorthouse turn white at the suggestion? He was pretty

white already.

" We'd better go into the surgery," he said after a pause and a glance of distaste at the litter in the room. " There's nowhere else fit to sit, and we shan't be disturbed." He crossed the room, and opened the door through which the girl had vanished. It led into a neat, but unremarkable surgery in which the girl herself was washing dishes at a tap.

" Miss Baddeley, my dispenser," Shorthouse said. " Inspector Calcott."

" Just the sort of thing I should have expected of you," said Marion Baddeley's eyes. She put the dish down with hostility in every line of her body.

" I daresay mine's not a nice trade," the inspector thought with some amusement, " but she needn't look as if she wanted to murder me."

" Marion," said Shorthouse, " run off like a good girl, will you, and help Molly get tea. The inspector wants to talk to me."

" You've got the Ryhope child coming at half-past four," Miss Baddeley reminded him, with her dark eyes still fixed on the inspector.

" Oh, Lord, so I have," said Shorthouse, running his hand through his hair. " And it's twenty past now." He looked a question at Calcott, who shook his head. " You'll have to ring up and put 'em off, that's all. Say I'll go round at six—no, that's no good. When *can* I go around? "

" You can't go round at all. You're booked all the evening," his dispenser said. " Can't I do it? It's only renewing the dressing, and I can bandage

better than you can. I'll tell them you aren't well, shall I?"

"All right, thanks awfully. Tell them I've had a sudden visitation," said Shorthouse, with a half-grin at the inspector. "I wish you could see that bitch from Bloomsbury, too. She always makes me want to take to my bed. But I'm afraid she'd scratch your eyes out. Cut along now, there's a good girl. I'll be as quick as I can. And don't fix me up with anyone else to-night."

"I certainly shouldn't," Miss Baddeley said. "You're not fit to see the people you've got already. There's something for you on the table there. You'd better drink it quickly, and I'll get the tea. I thought you might want it." She disappeared with a final glance at Calcott.

"Oh! Thanks." Shorthouse stepped across to the table, took up a small glass that stood on it, and drank up the contents.

"Pick-me-up?" the inspector enquired, almost without thinking. Shorthouse's fair face went scarlet, and he stood with the glass in his hand almost as if he had been struck.

"Aspirin," he said shortly. "I've got the most damnable headache—I've had a bit of flu, I think—and patients by the yard waiting to be seen. So will you be as quick as you can, inspector?"

"It was about a pick-me-up I wanted to see you," Calcott said. "That one you gave Mr. Cayley on Monday night. What was in it?"

"I told the man at the Institute. Didn't he tell you?"

" Nevertheless, I'd like to have it from you personally, please." Shorthouse repeated the formula. " Strychnine, one-fortieth of a grain. . . . Hm. . . . Dr. Shorthouse, are you aware that strychnine was found in Mr. Cayley's body . . . that the autopsy shows him to have died from strychnine poisoning? "

" Well, I thought he might have," said Shorthouse. " I was there, you know. But he didn't die of what I gave him, if that's what you're driving at."

" You don't think you may have mistaken the dose? "

" Mistaken? How could I? Ten times what I gave him wouldn't have killed him. Besides, I didn't. I checked up my poison book as soon as I got home, to make sure. You can see it if you like." He got up and handed a book to the inspector.

" In that case, Dr. Shorthouse," said Calcott without opening it, " how do you account for the fact that in the dregs of Mr. Cayley's lemonade was found strychnine enough to suggest that the full glass contained very much more than was in your prescription? "

" Did it? " said Shorthouse with something of a gasp. " Well—if it killed him I suppose it did."

" How did it get there? "

" I don't know. I don't know what he'd put in his glass. I wasn't there when he drank it. I don't even know that he put my stuff in." But he did, the inspector reflected—at least, if Miss Longman's evidence was to be relied upon. According to her, Cayley had dropped the prescription into his drink

immediately, with Shorthouse still standing by him. Or was she lying?

"You didn't see him put anything into his drink?"

"No," said Shorthouse, looking nervously at him. "I believe he's the liar," the inspector thought.

"Dr. Shorthouse, do you mean to tell me that Mr. Cayley took *another* dose of strychnine, obtained from some other source, in his lemonade, and died of it? Do you think that's likely?"

"It isn't a question of 'likely.' He *did,* because you found it inside him. And if you found it in his glass, too, I suppose that's where it was."

"And you still stick to it that there's no possibility of your having made a mistake?"

"I didn't make a mistake. Look in the poison-book, if you don't believe me. My stock of strychnine's in the cupboard. I'll weigh it for you, if you like."

"It isn't criminal to make a mistake," said the inspector reflectively, turning over the pages of the poison-book. They appeared in perfect order; but he was not inclined to atttach too much importance to that, knowing, fully as well as Mrs. Fremantle could tell him, the opportunity which a doctor has for acquiring extra supplies of dangerous drugs. "But if a doctor makes a mistake, and tries to cover it up, he renders himself liable to extremely unpleasant suspicions."

Shorthouse reddened angrily. "If you've come to arrest me for murdering Cayley, I wish you'd say so and be done with it," he said. "You policemen do

nothing but drop hints, till life's not worth living. There you are: there's the strychnine. I'll weigh it for you, if you'll trust me." He began weighing. Calcott watched his fingers, and again observed that they trembled a little.

"Are you acquainted with Mrs. Cayley, doctor?"

"Yes, I know her. I've never attended her."

"What do you think of Mrs. Cayley?"

"Oh, she's very beautiful," said Shorthouse absently. "And knows how to take care of herself all right."

"How do you know that?"

"Know what?" Shorthouse woke up suddenly. "Is this another of your damned traps? I know because I've watched her, and it's part of my business to know women, see?"

"*Personally?*"

"Personally be damned. I've not been making love to her, if that's what you mean. I've no time, and, for another thing, Mrs. Cayley wouldn't have looked at me. She was very well off where she was."

"You think Mr. Cayley was satisfied of that?"

"I don't know. I didn't discuss his wife with him. If he wasn't—if he'd any feelings such as you're trying to suggest—do you suppose he'd have employed me as his doctor?"

"Was he a suspicious man?"

"Haven't an idea. Are you going to keep me much longer, inspector?"

"I am anxious," said Calcott slowly, "for you to give me all the information you have, which may

bear on this crime. I do not feel at all sure that you have done so."

Shorthouse hesitated, and stared at him a full minute before replying. "I can't think of anything that would help you," he said at last; but Calcott had the impression that that was not what he had been going to say. "I'll tell you if I do."

"Very well, then." Calcott rose to take his leave. "I'll say good-afternoon. But I'm bound to warn you, Dr. Shorthouse, that other enquiries may be made. By hook or by crook, we've got to get to the bottom of this affair; and if you *do* know anything, believe me, you'd be much better advised to tell it at once."

Shorthouse bowed, and moved to let his visitor out. The smell of whiskey was still apparent on his breath as he stood in the doorway. Calcott passed out, rather puzzled with his interview. "The man's nervy and frightened," he thought to himself. "He's been drinking more than is good for him, and more, I should say, than he's used to. Also, he's keeping something back, or I'm a Dutchman. But what? And what's the cause of his fright? Is it something connected with Cayley's death, or not? Is it just that he's in debt and doesn't want the world to know it? He couldn't have murdered Cayley for his wealth, I should think —— or, stop a moment! Could he have owed Cayley money, for which the man was pressing him, and he couldn't risk exposure? Doesn't sound much motive for a murder; but yet, there was that American doctor—Parkman, wasn't it?—who cut up a col-

league and roasted him because he owed him about forty quid. I'd better look into that, anyway. Can't neglect a possibility. And then I'd better have a word with that dispenser young woman, and get his tale about his poison-book confirmed. Not" —he thought with amusement—" that I'm likely to get much change in that quarter." He recollected Miss Baddeley's furious glance at him on her last appearance, when, just as he was going, she had entered the room with a tray of tea and ordered Dr. Shorthouse, in peremptory tones, to drink it up at once. " I don't know whether Mrs. Cayley has a penchant for the young man, or not," he said to himself. " But it's certain Miss Baddeley has, and a pretty strong one, too." He took his way back to the police station.

Chapter VIII

BOARDING HOUSE CHORUS

Inspector Calcott was not the only person who was puzzled by the behaviour of the young doctor. At the Guest House, in Coburn Rise, Medstead Garden Suburb, he was also the subject of conversation.

The Guest House was a superior boarding-house, or Hall of Residence, as its proprietresses preferred to call it, situated in the most distant part of the Garden Suburb. It was kept by two spinster ladies, the Misses Jane and Millicent Forrester, of whom Jane was a thin-lipped, rather acidulated lady who had at some distant time been a school-mistress, and Millicent a fluffy, inconsequent little person who had been—well, nobody quite knew what she had been, and few could think of any position, other than a humble domestic one, which she could have filled without disaster. She attended to the rooms and the cooking, while her elder sister ran the establishment, and ran it, on the whole, cheaply and well; and the boarders, who included a fair number of the more impecunious of the intellectual members of the Suburb, were generally agreed that one could bear with Miss Millicent's sudden poppings-up, as of a Jack-in-the-box, at the most inconvenient times and places, and with her perpetual stream of irrelevant quotations, for the sake of an existence fairly regular and well-arranged—even if it did mean pay-

ing your bills promptly. On that Miss Jane Forrester was deaf to all pleas. One week owing, on no matter how good an excuse, and out you went. "I can't afford," she would say, pursing her lips, "to run this place on anything but a purely cash basis." And Miss Millicent, making a sudden dart into the room like an uncertain robin, would murmur:

"Will the love that you're rich in make a fire in the kitchen?",

and then retreat hastily, finding that she had addressed the most notoriously quarrelsome couple in the Suburb.

Among the boarders at the Guest House was Rachel Redford, whose father, strengthened in his feelings by relationship with several Guards officers, had very much objected to her so demeaning herself. But Rachel was quite determined to have a job of her own and live as she pleased, and, as the discipline of the Guards does not include any recipe for dealing with recalcitrant daughters, he was forced to give way. Her brother Tony, as already related, occasionally came to stay with her in his vacations, and Martin Delahaye was also an inmate, though lately, owing to his absorption in his office work, he had not frequently been seen at the Guest House table. The Misses Forrester served all their boarders at a single large table, really because this saved cruets and waiting, but obstensibly because it promoted free intercourse. "Fellowship," said Miss Millicent in her curious mutter—she always

muttered her quotations as if they were responses in church—" Fellowship is heaven, and lack of fellowship is hell." And, to point the reference, she had hand-painted several copies of this sentiment in Gothic letters, and pinned them up at intervals round the room, so that, unless you kept your eyes firmly glued to your food, you must look either at the other residents or at an adjuration to commit fellowship with them. Which, after a long day spent in office work, even Rachel, Socialist as she was, sometimes felt was difficult.

" I can't help feeling," she said to her brother as they were going down to supper on the evening of Shorthouse's inquisition, " that it's rotten to talk about Mr. Cayley the way we do—as if he was somebody in a novel." They had just come from a heated discussion of the murder.

" Then why d'you do it? " Tony asked unsympathetically.

" Because—because I'm interested, I suppose. I thought yesterday it was too horrible for words, and I'd never want to see or hear anything about it. Aunt Lydia asked me to go with her to the inquest to-morrow, and as first I couldn't bear the idea, but now ——"

" Now you think you'd like to go, eh? "

" We-ell, not *like*. But, Tony, I do want to know ——. Is it very beastly of me, do you think? "

" Don't see it matters," said Tony, not particularly interested in the moral problem. " I should go if you want to. If Aunt Lydia goes, it's respectable for a young thing, I should think."

"I didn't mean that."

"I don't believe you know what you do mean. We're not—none of us here—especially friends of Cayley's, or of his wife. We shouldn't have cared two pins if he'd just died ordinarily, and I don't see why we should pretend we're too cut up to take any interest in what happened to him and how it happened to him. Personally, I'm frightfully interested; and I know what I'd do if I were the police."

"You're going to say, 'Send for Mr. Wilson,' I know," Rachel said hastily. "But police don't send for private detectives, except in books. And anyway, I don't see that you know that he's so frightfully good."

"Look here, you're talking through your hat! Wilson's absolutely the best detective in England," Tony burst out. He had never recovered from the proud day on which he had actually assisted[1] the great Mr. Wilson to solve one of his cases, and he was always ready, in season and out of season, to sing the praises of this, the only private detective whom he knew. On the present occasion, however, the supper-bell rang just in time to save his sister from another repetition of the story of the Moldavian Minister and the two bullets; and they went down to the large, rush-carpeted dining-room, where they found a number of persons ardently continuing the conversation which had been taking place before.

The other inmates of the Guest House were ap-

[1] See *Superintendent Wilson's Holiday*, by G. D. H. and M. Cole.

parently of Tony's opinion with regard to talk about the mysterious death. They were not any more callous than any other casual group of people, but none had known Cayley well, and his was not the type of personality which exacts more than a decent show of sympathy after death. Already, the grim memory of that scene in the Institute was fading, and they were all ready to join cheerfully in a chase for the murderer, if it should turn out to be murder, and even to feel slightly defrauded if it should not.

Up to the present, the only available "suspect," appeared to be Dr. Shorthouse. But Dr. Shorthouse could hardly be called a good starter. In the first place, several of those present knew Shorthouse considerably better than they did Cayley, and were as unready as most of us really to admit a murderer among their acquaintance; and secondly, they were intellectuals all, and so unwilling to accept the hackneyed solution. All of them, that is to say, except Mrs. Fremantle's secretary, who, with a red spot glowing in either cheek, stoutly maintained the doctor's guilt.

"I saw him give it to Mr. Cayley," she reiterated with dull persistence. "And then I saw Mr. Cayley put it in his glass and drink it. And then he died."

"But you don't know he died of *it*," George Thorley, the secretary of the Medstead Branch of the League of Nations Union, protested. "He may have taken lots of other things."

"He did not," said Miss Longman, "for I was watching him all the time."

"Why?" said Rachel, who thought Miss Longman spiteful.

"All the time," Miss Longman repeated, taking no notice of the interruption. "He took *that*. And then he died. It's absolutely obvious that ——"

"But, my dear lady," Thorley said, "you're not telling us half the story. Don't you realize that the obvious person who had the opportunity isn't a bit certain to be the guilty party? You've got to prove possession of poison, and motive, and a hundred other things. Let's take motive, for a start. What sort of motive do you imagine our young friend had for bumping off Cayley?"

"That's easy," said another man, who obviously approved of the attempt to treat the crime as if it had been a new sort of cross-word puzzle. "Cherchez la femme."

"Cherchez Mrs. Cayley, you mean. But, my dear fellow, what good does that do you? In the first place, it's libellous ——"

"Well, you can't suggest motives without being libellous. It's not half as libellous as suggesting the man's a murderer, anyway!"

"I didn't. I'm suggesting the opposite, if you'd only listen. But let that pass. In the second place, I don't know that there's any evidence for supposing that Shorthouse is—or was—carrying on with Mrs. Cayley." At this point several voices interrupted him, and he turned on them. "Well, what *is* the evidence?"

"General grounds," said somebody.

"General grounds! My dear fools, people don't

kill on general grounds. Nobody ever went round polishing off the husbands of all the ladies he'd a liking for. Your 'general grounds' does more to let Shorthouse out of it than anything else I've heard. If you don't believe me, ask a policeman. I see you don't, but you'll take in this, perhaps. If Shorthouse does love Leah Cayley, what's he stand to gain by wiping out Harold? He can't marry her; he's got a wife of his own. You all know Mrs. Shorthouse—I ask you. . . . I beg your pardon?"

"He for God only, she for God in him," Miss Millicent repeated, in a suddenly audible voice.

"*Exactly,*" said Thorley, frowning on some gigglers. "Exactly. You've expressed my meaning admirably. 'She for God in him'—and if she's got an odd taste in deities, it's not for me to say. But there, you see, supposing he *does* commit murder for Leah, he doesn't get her, unless his wife will let him go, or unless he's prepared to kill her too. And so you've got to introduce another pure hypothesis, if not two, into the business. . . . What did you say?"

"I said he needn't have meant to kill him, even if he did," said Rachel. "He might have given him too much of something, somehow, so that he died of it. I mean, it might have been a mistake."

"Overdose of something, eh?" said Thorley, pondering the suggestion in a rather dissatisfied manner. Obviously he would have preferred a murder. "Well, that's certainly possible. And, by Jove, if that's so, that would explain why Short-

house came hurtling back into the meeting in such a hurry—if he'd suddenly thought of something he might have done. Miss Greenwood—she was with him, you know, outside—said he raced back as if he'd been stung when he heard Cayley—call out." He tripped a little over the word, as the recollection of that cry came back to him. "And he certainly looked as queer as blazes. It looks as though he might have done it by accident."

"Accident!" Miss Longman snorted. "I know all about that kind of accident. The police don't generally call it accident, when a doctor poisons a man with strychnine!"

"That isn't true, anyway, Miss Longman," a girl interrupted. "Dr. Shorthouse didn't give Mr. Cayley nearly enough poison to kill him; he looked in his poison-book to make sure. Marion Baddeley told me."

"Marion Baddeley!" The two words contained an entire contemptuous summing-up of the relations between Dr. Shorthouse and his dispenser. "Perhaps you don't know, Miss Richardson, that they found four times as much poison in Mr. Cayley's glass as Dr. Shorthouse said he'd given him?"

"What!" This sounded so definite that even Thorley pricked up his ears. "But, excuse me, Miss Longman, how do you know?"

"I heard it," said Miss Longman. "At the police-station, when I went to tell the detective what had happened on Monday night. The sergeant was telling a constable that there was a quarter of a grain *at least* in Mr. Cayley's lemonade. Now, per-

haps, you'll believe that I know what I'm talking about. It's people like you, Mr. Thorley, who can't take even murder seriously, who give men like Dr. Shorthouse their chance! You don't seem to realise that it's a dead man you're talking about, and not cinema plays!"

As this was just what George Thorley did not want to realise, he coloured up, and there was an awkward pause for a moment, until Miss Jane Forrester, who had just returned from dishing up the pudding in time to hear the end of Miss Longman's speech, intervened, and crushed the speaker in a sentence.

"I don't care for slander, here, Miss Longman," she said.

"Slander!" cried the lady addressed, looking as though she herself had been outrageously slandered. "I was only saying——"

"I am quite aware what you were saying," said Miss Forrester. "I have heard you saying it to everyone in the last two days. I should not be surprised if Dr. Shorthouse brought an action against you."

"I say, though," Thorley said, recovering himself rapidly, "he'd have to be pretty sure of himself to do that, wouldn't he?"

"If he is sure of his innocence, Mr. Thorley," said Miss Jane, "there is no reason why he should not take steps to put a stop to ill-natured gossip."

"But, I say, though, I thought you thought . . . I mean, I thought you didn't . . ."

"Approve of Dr. Shorthouse," said Miss Jane.

"I do not. I have never approved of him since he made that very unpleasant suggestion to the Committee."

"What suggestion?" Tony wanted to know.

"That the Debating Society should debate on 'The Future of Nudity,'" Thorley rapidly explained to him. "Meant to attract Mrs. Fremantle, see? Get rid of the trammels, and all that. Maintained that love would be much purer if we all went about with nothing on. But it didn't catch on, somehow."

"If you loved me ever so little," muttered Miss Millicent,

"I could bear the bonds that gall,
I could dream the bonds were brittle ——
Stays, you know," she added with a beaming smile.

"Splendid!" said Thorley. "But what a frightful dream—I mean to have brittle stays. Do you ever dream it, Miss Millicent?"

"Oh, yes," Miss Millicent said. "But it means something quite different, when you do. Doesn't it, Dr. Pogofsky?"

"Don't be ridiculous, Millicent," said her sister severely, while the psycho-analyst addressed buried his head in his plate. "I do not approve of Dr. Shorthouse; but I have good reasons for saying that he had nothing to do with Mr. Cayley's death."

"What reasons?" several people enquired. Miss Jane shut her lips and looked down her nose.

"I shall inform the police at the proper time," she said. "*I* do not believe in making accusations at dinner-tables." And she directed another glance at Miss Longman.

"Ticked off in one, by gum!" Tony murmured. "Hullo, here's Martin! Hi, Martin! There's a chair by us, but there's precious little left to eat near it."

"You are very late, Mr. Delahaye," said Miss Jane, with a quite ferocious frigidity, as she watched Martin Delahaye make his way down the room. He looked better than he had done, Tony thought, and he smiled a greeting to Rachel as he slipped into the vacant chair. "I'm afraid there will not be much meat left."

"Going to get fifty lines, and go without his supper, poor chap," Tony thought; but Martin did not seem moved.

"I don't want anything, thanks," he said, pouring himself some water. "Pass a biscuit, will you, Thorley?"

"How's the larger intestine, old chap?" the latter said, as he complied.

"Rotten. Oh, I don't know. Better, I think," said Martin.

"Are you taking anything for your indigestion, Mr. Delahaye?" Miss Jane said, in a voice so incisive that everyone looked up except Martin. Rachel gave him a nudge.

"Eh? Pardon?" said Martin, with his mouth full of biscuit.

"I said, are you taking anything for your indigestion" Miss Jane repeated.

"No. No good," said Martin; and then casually glanced up, meeting Miss Jane's eyes. Then, to the surprise of the onlookers, he suddenly flushed scar-

let, and dropped his head almost to the table, muttering something inaudible to Rachel. Miss Jane remained silent, with an unmistakeable curve of triumph on her lips, and after a moment the incident passed, and the conversation returned happily to the subject of Dr. Cayley's death. It was only Rachel who noticed that Martin was quite silent, and that his hand shook unaccountably as he cut his cheese, and she was too cautious of his present moods to make any comment. Tony, however, less scrupulous, enquired as he said good-night "what was eating Martin."

"Nothing! What are you talking about?" Rachel said fiercely.

"Oh, all right, keep your wool on. I only thought you two might have had a little tiff, you know, or something like that."

"Well, we haven't!"

"I'm sorry to hear it."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Well," Tony explained, "if you had I'd hope you'd make it up again soon, and we'd all be happy. But if you haven't, I'm afraid it must be Martin's temper going wrong, and I'd hate to have a bear for a brother-in-law."

"You're perfectly beastly!" the girl exclaimed, with the more violence that she was herself troubled by Martin's quick changes of temper. "He isn't well, and he's horribly overworked. He's been having to stay at his office night after night to get things done. You don't understand a bit; you never did any work in your life!"

"And I hope I never may, if that's the effect it has," said Tony, unrepentant. "All right, Ray, I daresay you know your own business best. But I wish you'd try and persuade the lad to work a little less hard. For you must admit he isn't just mother's little sunbeam as things are."

Chapter IX

TWO HOURS PASS

Detective Inspector Calcott sat in his rooms at Muswell Hill, and wearily turned over his papers for the fiftieth time since dinner. Since the interview with Shorthouse, he had laboriously been trying to pick up information in any quarter, and had totally failed. He had carried off all the papers of the late Mr. Cayley, and had gone through them half-a-dozen times, without finding anything that suggested the faintest motive for murder or suicide. His monetary affairs were in perfect order; there was no indication that he either owed or was owed any considerable sum; the cheques drawn to Self were only of reasonable size and frequency; and there were none of the mysterious payments marked X which so often come to the rescue of the detective of fiction. There was nothing in the dead man's personal effects which indicated dubious or passionate relations with a single soul. All his possessions went to his wife, except a legacy of fifty pounds to the Institute and a hundred to the Proportional Representation Society—" I don't suppose they're so hard up as to murder a man for a hundred quid," the inspector thought—but the total of possessions was only a thousand pounds of insurance money, another thousand of savings, and a house with a mortgage on it. Nor did Mrs. Cayley owe money

in any visible direction. Beautiful as she was, she was economical in personal expenditure.

He had even been to see the bank, in case their cashier might have been in possession of some exclusive information, say about the forging of a cheque, for which he could have been murdered; but there too he had drawn blank. The Capital and Counties Bank had no forgeries and no difficulties, thank you, and were not very pleased at the suggestion. And if there *had* been anything wrong (which there hadn't), the bank manager represented that the late Mr. Cayley would not have lost so much as half an hour in informing him all about it. He was a good servant, but his fault was fussiness. If he had an idea that one clerk was wasting an ounce of his time, or one form badly drafted, he would rush off to the manager's office with his trouble; and if there had been anything really wrong, why, he would have burst with it in five minutes. No, there was no help from the bank.

Under the circumstances, Calcott's mind returned to the one man who had certainly behaved suspiciously—Dr. Shorthouse. He considered what case there was against the doctor. That he had seemed nervous and contradicted himself at the police-station Calcott put aside. He was obviously a nervous type, and, even assuming his complete innocence, he had, on his own statement, given Cayley a dose containing strychnine, and had then seen the man die under his eyes of strychnine poisoning. It was enough to rattle anyone, Calcott admitted. But it was now two days from the murder—long enough

for him to have collected himself and not still to be drinking and running down pedestrians. Besides—what was he concealing? Calcott had had enough experience of witnesses to make him as sure as Miss Lydia that he could detect a liar when he saw one, and he was perfectly certain that Shorthouse, when he interviewed him, was lying at some point or other. But at what point he could not be sure; nor, of course, what lie exactly he had told. Did it bear on the murder, or not? The probabilities seemed that it did; and, if it did, could it be anything but that he had put the poison into Cayley—was, in fact, himself the murderer? Here Calcott gave himself a shake. You could not, obviously, accuse a man of committing a murder just because you felt inclined to disbelieve him when he said he didn't. There must be *some* apparent motive, and what could it be? As far as he could see, there were only three possible motives—Leah Cayley, some financial difficulty, or a personal quarrel. As to the first, the difficulty was that Shorthouse had a wife already, so could hardly be setting Mrs. Cayley free for marriage. Nor did he sound in a financial position suitable for the keeping of a mistress. It was possible, Calcott supposed, to hate your ladylove's husband so much as to remove him, even if it left your own way still blocked; but it really sounded rather an altruistic murder for anyone in Shorthouse's position. Nor, as a matter of fact, did he believe that either Shorthouse or Mrs. Cayley was in love with the other. The note of indifference, on both sides, had sounded perfectly genuine.

Of a personal quarrel there was not a shred of evidence. It might have existed, no doubt, but nobody seemed to know about it. The same applied to his financial solution. That Shorthouse was short of cash—or, at any rate, was keeping his wife short of cash—the inspector knew from his own eavesdropping; but it did not appear in what way Cayley's death would have remedied that situation, unless Shorthouse had owed him money of which no record was available. And that, of course, was the merest conjecture. Conjecture notwithstanding, however, this was the motive which, of the three, the inspector most favoured, and he decided to get in touch with Superintendent Walrond, and find out whether the latter knew anything of Shorthouse's financial affairs—or of his relations with Mrs. Cayley, since, after all, one might as well kill two birds with one stone.

Superintendent Walrond, he found, was at the police-station, and he rang him up there. The Superintendent was interested, but not very full of information. As to Mrs. Cayley, he said, as far as he could make out there had been a mild flirtation, but it was over more than a year ago, and it had never been really serious. (In passing, the Superintendent observed that very few of Mrs. Cayley's affairs were serious. The men were pretty hard hit, but Mrs. Cayley knew how to take care of herself, he thought). It did not appear to be at her wish that Cayley had changed his doctor, but at his own—if indeed he had changed, for only she and Dr. Shorthouse seemed to know anything about it. Dr. Mid

hurst had not been notified at all, which was a bit unusual, with a careful particular man like Cayley. Still, there was no particular reason to suppose that he hadn't changed; and, if he had, that made it pretty certain that there hadn't been a quarrel between him and Shorthouse. Anyway, the superintendent had had no news of any quarrel except a bit of a breeze which had occurred more than a year ago, just at the time when Shorthouse was having his—whatever he did have—with Mrs. Cayley; and, with all the talk that was going around about Shorthouse, he felt fairly certain he'd have picked up traces of a row, if there had been one. The row idea seemed pretty much of a wash-out.

What about the money? Here the Superintendent was more communicative. "There isn't a shadow of doubt," he said, "that Shorthouse is pretty hard up. He owes right and left in the neighbourhood as much as it's safe for him to owe; and one or two would be inclined to put him in court, at that, if it wasn't common knowledge that he's nothing but what he earns, to pay them with; and if they spoil that they'll get nothing."

"Does he earn much?" Calcott asked.

"Oh, a tidy bit. Nothing to write home about. But it's going up."

"Then what's he spend it on? Not his house, for I've seen it."

"Old debts, mostly. Sent up his standard too fast for his earnings, at the beginning, and came here with a pocketfull of bills. From what I can see, it's the same as with most of 'em; married young, got

three children rising school age, and never clear of the expense of their being born. His wife's a school-teacher, Warwickshire way, and knows no more about managing a house than my hat."

"Is he extravagant? Betting man?"

"Not that I know of. A careless fellow, more, if you understand me. Likes good drink, and a meal at a restaurant, and a decent dress-suit and a week-end in Paris. No harm in it, except the last, possibly; but he just can't afford it, see?"

"But all that's no good to us," Calcott reflected, "unless this affair was likely to put him in funds. And as to that——"

"Not a sign of it," the Superintendent assured. "Hold on half a minute, will you?" There was a crackling noise at the other end of the telephone, and when the Superintendent's voice came back, it sounded considerably more excited.

"Talk of the devil," he said. "Dr. Shorthouse has just come around, and says he wants to tell us something. Would you like to hear it?"

"I would indeed," Calcott said. "I'll be round in twenty minutes."

"Right you are. We'll keep him waiting till you come."

It was less than twenty minutes before Calcott drew up his car at the door of the police-station, and, entering, found himself, for the third time that day, face to face with Dr. Shorthouse.

"So you *did* know rather more than you told me this afternoon?" He opened the conversation meanwhile scanning Shorthouse narrowly for any change

in his demeanour. There was nothing perceptible; he looked like a man who had screwed himself up to a distasteful task, and that was all.

"Yes," he said in answer to the question. "I was a fool not to tell you at the time. . . . I'd had a rotten time, and I lost my head. Anyway, it hasn't done any harm. I mean, it's nothing to do with Cayley's murder . . . it's only to put myself straight, without . . . doing any more harm than need be. I don't suppose it'll be necessary to go in for a great deal of publicity, will it?"

"Suppose you tell us exactly what *it* is," Calcott interrupted. "Then we can see where we are."

"It's only this—I made a mistake with the dose I gave Cayley."

"Oh. With what ingredient?"

"With the strychnine."

"Oh. Yes?"

"I put too much in."

"How much too much?"

"I . . . can't tell you, quite. About a quarter of a grain. It may have been a bit less, or a bit more."

"And how did you come to discover this?"

"When I went through my stock."

"When?"

"The morning after."

"After his death. Yes. And this afternoon you told me there wasn't any missing, and showed me your book to prove it?"

"Yes . . . That wasn't true."

"You'd faked your book?"

"Yes. I . . . I had to make it square. I didn't want the . . . the mistake known. But then I thought, as it wasn't a fatal dose anyway, I'd better tell you about it."

"Yes. You'd better tell us all about it from the beginning, Dr. Shorthouse," Calcott said, looking at him with a slightly puzzled air. "When did you make the mistake?"

"When I made the pills up, in the afternoon."

"Pills? How many were there?"

"Half-a-dozen."

"What's happened to the rest?"

"I threw them away."

"When?"

"The same night."

"The same night. Then you knew—when Cayley died—that you'd made a mistake?"

"I didn't *know*. I thought I might have."

"Thought you might have! Dr. Shorthouse, do you generally mistake a quarter of a grain for a fortieth?"

"No, I don't. That was why I didn't want it known. It was—quite an exceptional thing."

"I think," said Calcott, "you'd better tell me the story straight, Dr. Shorthouse. Don't leave anything out, please. If what you're saying is correct, you have been incredibly foolish, and the best you can do is to tell me without any more nonsense."

Shorthouse shifted uneasily in his chair, and pushed back a damp fair lock from his forehead. Then he began, rather slowly.

"I made up half-a-dozen of those pills, before I

came out. I generally carry some, to parties. People come over groggy, and want something quick, and they're likely "—he glanced up at Calcott—" they're likely to remember a doctor who's been on the spot when he's wanted. I can't afford to waste opportunities. But—I was in an awful hurry. I'd been a long time on a case, and had to run it desperately fine . . . and I was feeling muzzy in the head; and I must have made a mistake."

" Stop a minute," Calcott interrupted. " You say you were ' muzzy in the head.' Do you mean you were drunk? "

" I didn't think I was," Shorthouse said, " but I suppose I must have been a bit. I'd had no lunch, and I thought I was getting flu, so I took a drink to go on with. I'd no idea, though, I'd been anything like as thick as that. I thought I was just fagged out."

" Well, go on."

" Then I got to the Institute, and, after a bit, Cayley came along and said he was feeling ill, and I must give him something to pull him together. So I handed him one of the pills, and I didn't think anything more about it. I'd got a bit of a head, myself, by that time, and I was beginning to wonder just how screwed I'd been; but I wasn't thinking of anything—particular."

" I went out after the lecture, to get a bit of air, and I'd had a sort of a stroll. I was just coming back—I was almost outside the door, when I heard an awful scream from inside. Then somebody said, " Isn't that Mr. Cayley? ", and it suddenly came to

me, what if I'd made a mistake in his dose? So I rushed in and then I saw that old fool Midhurst messing about with him, and his glass standing by the door. I made a grab for it, but that girl had got there first. So all I could do was to spill it."

"Destroying evidence?"

"Well, I suppose that's what you'd call it. I wouldn't have destroyed it if I could have got hold of it."

"Not even if it had turned out to have a poisonous dose in it?"

"Not if it had killed him. But when I came to look, I knew it couldn't have. There wasn't enough gone."

"How much was gone? And when did you find out?"

"When I got home from the police-station. Some time after three. There was . . . just about a grain and a half gone. And as there were six pills, and he'd only had one, it couldn't have killed him."

You're very certain," Calcott said. "I seem to have heard that one-fifth of a grain has been known to cause death."

Shorthouse shook his head positively. "Not with him. He'd taken too much already of every kind of drug that's known. He was like Mithradates. It would have taken an elephant's dose to kill him. When I looked, I knew *I* hadn't done it, whoever had."

"In that case, Dr. Shorthouse, why did you fake your poison book, and lie to me?"

"I told you I'd been a fool," the man muttered. "I thought I'd covered it up. Supposing that came out . . . what I've told you . . . who do you think's going to go to a doctor that makes mistakes of that kind? I can't afford to run risks! Ask him"—pointing to Walrond—"if you don't believe me. I'm only just keeping things going as it is. I thought I'd just manage to keep out of it. But, after you'd gone, I guessed you didn't believe me, and I thought I'd do better to face the music than be accused of murder."

"I see." Calcott looked at him, and then down at the notes in his hand. "Then what you did is this. You made up six pills under the influence of drink. Of these you gave Mr. Cayley one. When you heard him cry out you suspected something had gone wrong, and rushed back into the hall. Being unable to get Mr. Cayley out of Dr. Midhurst's care, you tried to get hold of the glass from which he had been drinking, and when you failed, you knocked it over. When you got home, you verified your quantity of strychnine, and found that one-and-a-half grains was missing. Then you falsified your poison-book, and assured me you had made no mistake, having destroyed the other five pills—when?"

"Outside the Institute," Shorthouse muttered. "I buried 'em under a bush."

"Yes—outside the Institute. Is that all?"

"That's all," said Shorthouse, looking up with a faint relief in his glance. "Isn't it enough for you?" he added. "I should have thought you'd got enough lunacy there."

"You say," the inspector continued, "that you put a quarter of a grain into each tablet."

"That or thereabouts."

"And that that wasn't enough to kill Mr. Cayley?"

"Not on your life."

"Would a grain and a half have been enough to kill him?"

Shorthouse reflected a minute. "I daresay. Yes, it might have. But he didn't have it. I only put a grain and a half in altogether."

"But suppose he had taken the lot?"

"But I tell you he didn't! He only took one pill. I only gave him one."

"You think that we are to take your word for that, after your demonstration of your care in making up prescriptions?"

Shorthouse started. "Oh, God! You mean—I might have put it all in one. But I didn't—I swear I didn't! I mixed them all up together."

"That'll have to be looked into," Calcott said, with a nod to the Superintendent. "You know where you put those other pills. Could you find them again?"

"What, now? I suppose so. I know whereabouts they were, and I didn't bury them deep."

"Well," said Calcott, "I think the best thing you can do is to go and find them. We'll send a man up with you." The Superintendent rose and left the room. "Then we'll know where we are. I suppose," he continued, "you realise, supposing your story's true, just about how much a fool you've made

of yourself? What do you think you're going to sound like in the witness-box?"

"Have you got to have it all out there, the whole damn lot?" Shorthouse asked piteously. "I thought you fellows controlled what came out in public or not. Of course I'm in your hands. . . . Look here, I don't want to whine; but you realise don't you, that if you bring all this out in court, you'll break me, and—and I'm not the only person who'll suffer by it. I've confessed. I'm the world's most blithering fool, and I've been obstructing the police, or trying to. But, hang it all, what good is it going to do you to bring it all out?"

Calcott looked him up and down for a moment, considering. Shorthouse sat with his shoulders squared for a blow, and his head bent down.

"You can't," Calcott said at last, "expect to make mistakes and slip out of them as lightly as that. Even if your story's all right you'll have to go through with the business about the pills, in the coroner's court, and it'll be for him to say how far he chooses to take it. But I don't know that the rest of the business is relevant—yet. Mind, I'm not making any promises. You haven't given us any too much reason to trust you, and I'll have to look into it a bit further. But I'm not inclined to be hard on a man for a moment of blind panic; and if I'm satisfied you're going straight, I'll think about it. I can't say fairer than that. Meanwhile"—as Shorthouse, with a heavy sigh, was getting up to go—"I've one or two other questions to put to you, and you'll please answer them in a friendlier man-

ner than you did this afternoon. Did you owe Mr. Cayley money?"

"Lord, no!" The surprise was obviously genuine. "I never had a chance. He wasn't the lending sort."

"Did you ever have a quarrel with him?"

"Not that I remember."

"Not over his wife?"

"Oh, that! That's ancient history. Besides, it wasn't anything. I did admire Mrs. Cayley, like everybody else, for a bit; and I used to take her out now and then. Cayley tried to tick me off, once; and I lost my temper. But there was nothing in it, and he knew it. We were fairly friendly, but Mrs. Cayley knew as well as anyone which side her bread was buttered. Ask her, if you don't believe me. It was just one of Cayley's tantrums; we didn't even stop seeing one another."

"Thank you. Then, if I may ask you to step along with the constable, and find those other pills for me——" He dismissed Shorthouse, and returned to his seat at the table.

"Well, that's a fool," Superintendent Walrond remarked, "if ever I saw one! Fancy thinking you can hide what's been in a glass by simply upsetting it!"

"Quite impossible," the inspector agreed. "And it's pretty clear, I should say, that he realised, when he came to think it over, that you couldn't, and that's what brought him along here. It *was* a quarter of a grain the analyst found, wasn't it?"

"Yes," grumbled the superintendent. "And if

he'd only told us straight off that it was *he* put it in, he'd have saved us a devil of a lot of trouble."

"Put it in what?" Calcott said. "I'm reserving judgment till he comes back with those pills."

"Oh! You think the whole lot was in one of them? But not in the one Shorthouse gave him, that he put in the glass."

"No, not in that one. But, so far, we've only Shorthouse's word about what became of the others, and what was in them. Suppose there was another, with a much larger dose, about which nothing has been said. You must admit, this hasty burying of the rest of the pills looks a bit odd."

"Darnfool thing to do, even if his story's straight," said the Superintendent. "He'd much better have kept them by him. I think he deserves a bit of gruelling, myself, whether or no."

"He does," Calcott agreed. "And he's going to get it good and plenty at the inquest to-morrow, unless I'm very much mistaken. I saw Philipson to-day, and he's certainly out to have his money's worth of sensation. I think you may be sorry for our friend before it's over. And, in view of that, I think I'll leave you to deal with the question of the pills, supposing they turn up. Get the analyst to do them first thing to-morrow, and phone me what he says. The inquest is not till 10.30, so I think he'll have time. I've got some things I must get cleared up to-night."

"We don't seem getting on over-fast," the Superintendent said.

"We do not, Mrs. Gummidge. Good-night."

Chapter X

SCENE AT AN INQUEST

The affair of the pills turned out moderately well for Dr. Shorthouse. The five of them were duly discovered in their phial underneath a laurel bush, and when analysed proved each to contain just over a quarter of a grain of strychnine. This, however, did not save him from the gruelling which the inspector had prophesied. Calcott was a fair judge of men, and he had not miscalculated the mood of the Coroner of Medstead. From the moment at which the inquest opened, in a dirty little schoolroom in a slum, it was obvious that Dr. Philipson had only one purpose in his mind, the flaying of his unfortunate fellow-practitioner. One would have supposed that a Coroner would have at least enquired into the possibility of accident or suicide; but he hardly touched upon it.

The sergeant who had conducted the preliminary enquiry came first, and, when he had finished, the police doctor, Dr. Midhurst, and the analyst each gave their evidence about Cayley's actual death and its causes. Of the analyst the Coroner enquired whether suicide was likely; and, having received the reply that it was perfectly possible, pointed out to the jury the extreme improbability of a man choosing to poison himself with so unpleasant a drug. Next came Miss Longman, with her evidence about the

glass, keyed-up and vindictive, and the analyst was recalled to explain what was in it. This part of the proceedings the Coroner obviously enjoyed, and spun them out as a pleasant appetiser for Dr. Shorthouse, upon whom he then proceeded to fall like an army with banners. For a few minutes, the inspector wondered whether he really thought he could get a verdict of murder against the young man.

"It's a bit thick, really," the Superintendent murmured in his ear, as Dr. Philipson, having taken Shorthouse for the third time through his mistake in making up the pills, began to press him on the date of his explanations to the police and his reasons for delay. "I thought you were being a bit soft with Shorthouse last night, myself, as good as promising him he shouldn't be asked about his faking his books; but I didn't think this was going to happen. The shame of it is, it wouldn't, only Philipson's a doctor himself and grudges young Shorthouse every patient he gets. It's professional spite, that's what it is, and all the world knows it. I can't see it's fair, myself."

"It may be better for Shorthouse, if he's innocent, to have it all out now, for all that," Calcott whispered back. "He's got to take his medicine some time. He's been a damned fool, and there's bound to be a fair amount of talk about it in all sorts of quarters. If he gets a large overdose now I think you'll find he'll pick up some sympathy which he wouldn't otherwise have had. That's partly why I let Philipson have his head. Of course, as a Coroner he's an idiot, and as an enquiry the whole thing's a

farce. But that doesn't matter to us."

His prognostication was being very well fulfilled in the case of one portion of the audience. Rachel, who had taken her brother's advice and accompanied Miss Lydia to the inquest, was highly incensed at the Coroner's behaviour, and her aunt shared her views.

"For two pins," the latter declared, in a voice certainly audible to more than her immediate neighbours, "I'd poke his eye out with my umbrella. Where do you suppose the man was brought up, letting out his private spites in a police-court?"

"It's beastly!" Rachel said, as Dr. Shorthouse, with hands clenched, admitted that he had not told the police about his mistake until the previous evening because he had hoped to succeed in concealing it. ("Is that your idea, sir, of professional honour?" thundered the Coroner. "No," said Shorthouse in an almost inaudible whisper). "And *you* don't know how beastly it is of him, Aunt Lydia! You've no idea how people talk here, and how some of them hate Dr. Shorthouse. He'll lose half his patients, and then how is he to live? Of course, that's what that disgusting old man wants, I suppose!"

"He won't lose his patients," Miss Lydia prophesied. "There are hundreds of women who'd give their eyes to be treated by a doctor who's been in a murder case."

"Not by a doctor who gives poison by mistake," Rachel said shrewdly. "And not in the Garden Suburb, either. They're all too respectable. Mrs.

Fremantle's been saying she'll turn anybody out of the Institute who goes to him, after this."

"Oh, she will, will she?" said Miss Lydia, her eye kindling at the mention of Mrs. Fremantle's name. "We'll have to see what can be done about that." And she relapsed into a grim silence which she maintained during the remainder of the proceedings.

Dr. Shorthouse's purgatory was at last terminated, though very unwillingly, it appeared, by the Coroner; and Mrs. Harold Cayley appeared to take his place. She was as beautiful as ever in her deep mourning, and the whole courtroom, male and female alike, paid her the tribute of a gasp; but she contributed no more than she had given to Calcott on the previous day. All that could be gathered from her was that her husband was perfectly happy and in his usual health, and had no enemies. Dr. Philipson drew from her a strong opinion that Cayley was unlikely to commit suicide, and immediately began his summing up, in which he firmly directed the jury to return a verdict of wilful murder against some person or persons unknown, explaining to them that suicide or accident were out of the question, "the only *accident*" he emphasised spitefully, "which has been indicated, having occurred through the highly culpable negligence of one of the witnesses, whose conduct is as deserving of censure as anything I have seen in this court!"

"Might as well ask for manslaughter against young Shorthouse, and be done with it," Superintendent Walrond commented.

"He wouldn't get it," Calcott returned. "Look at the face of the foreman. I told you Philipson would overreach himself."

The jury retired, but returned in a minute with the verdict they had been instructed to give. "And is there nothing you wish to add to your verdict?" the coroner asked with meaning.

"Our deep sympathy with the deceased's wife, sir," the foreman replied, looking him straight in the face. The Coroner gave an angry grunt, and Superintendent Walrond the ghost of a chuckle. The crowd was beginning to disperse, when Miss Lydia stepped into the breach with a final sensation.

"Dr. Shorthouse!" she called in her clearest tones. "I wonder if you could come and have lunch with me? There are one or two things I'm anxious to have your advice on, and I should be so grateful if you could. My car is outside, and I can drive you anywhere." There was a slight buzz of interest and surprise; and Dr. Shorthouse, who had been sitting, since the Coroner released him, huddled beside his dispenser, looked up with a face which obviously contained no recollection of Miss Lydia. In a moment or two, however, his natural gifts came to his aid, and he responded with a charming smile.

"That will be delightful. I'll be with you in one moment, Miss ——," giving a very good imitation of an unintelligible surname. He bent over to say something to Marion Baddeley. The something obviously displeased her, for her black brows met in a scowl; but she apparently let it pass, and in a moment or two followed Shorthouse out. Miss Lydia

and her great-niece were waiting on the steps, Miss Lydia's Daimler parked obsequiously in front of them. In the road a little knot of people were standing, obviously waiting for Shorthouse, and, to judge from their faces, with no friendly intent; but when he appeared shepherding an old lady into a large car, they were nonplussed and hung back a trifle.

" 120 Berkeley Square, Holmes," said Miss Lydia, clearly, to the chauffeur. " Get in, Dr. Shorthouse." And in another moment the car had slid off. With the tail of her eye, Rachel watched the dispenser climbing into a shabby little two-seater which stood a little further up the road.

" God be thanked for British snobbery," said Miss Lydia. " An address in Berkeley Square, spoken loudly enough, still does wonders with a crowd. Needless to say, I don't live there. Ridiculously expensive, pretentious neighbourhood. But 120 belongs to a sort of titled cousin of mine—who, incidentally, has done far more harm than poisoning one cashier by his high financial swindles—and his address does for any emergency. You may smoke it you like, Dr. Shorthouse. I expect you need it."

Shorthouse took out a gasper, and lit it with shaking hands. He was stretching and kneading his limbs on the cushions of the car as if his body, as well as his mind, had been cramped in fetters for the last two hours. " This is most awfully good of you," he said. " I owe you a mountain of thanks."

" I think you do," Miss Lydia said drily. " I don't think the world's so friendly to you at this moment

as you'd like. But we'll leave them unsaid, if you please. I do as I please—and for my own pleasure."

"You said something about wanting to consult me," Shorthouse said after a moment's pause. "Is there anything ——?" Miss Lydia gave a hoarse chuckle.

"No, no, young man, don't flatter yourself. You haven't secured a new patient. I'm in no present need of a doctor; and, if I were, I prefer them solid and out-of-date. But I wanted to say something that the creatures in that room could hear. I can't, at my age, carry off a personable young man I don't know at all, merely because he's temporarily notorious. No, no, this kidnapping is purely in your interests, you exceedingly foolish fellow. But, as I have temporarily lent you the support of Mayfair, I think you might satisfy an old woman's curiosity on one or two points. How on earth did you imagine you were going to keep the police from finding out that you'd muddled your drugs, supposing they came and asked you about it?"

"They did come," said Shorthouse, making a wry face. "And I made a complete idiot of myself." He hesitated a few seconds. "I'll tell you if you like," he said, "and if you'll promise not to tell anyone else. The police know already, so I'm not asking you to compound a felony. But I'd rather nobody else did."

"I swear I won't say a word," said Rachel fervently.

"We think," Miss Lydia grinned, "that you've had about your fair share of publicity over this af-

fair. We will pledge ourselves not to tell Mrs. Fremantle. But we would very much like to hear it." She took up the speaking-tube. "Round the Park till I tell you to stop, Holmes. Go on, Dr. Shorthouse."

Briefly, Shorthouse told them the story which he had already told at the Medstead Police Station, and gave the absent inspector his due meed of thanks for not having brought it out at the inquest.

"Yes, yes," said Miss Lydia, when he had finished. "But does nobody look at your poison book except yourself?"

"Only my dispenser."

"Well, wouldn't she have found out about your juggling with your drugs? Or are you so skilful a forger?"

"I'm not a forger at all," said Shorthouse. "I shouldn't be the faintest good at it. I always make a filthy mess with pen and ink. She did it for me."

"Your dispenser—faked your poison-book!"

"Yes."

"Humph!" said Miss Lydia. "And you think she wouldn't give you away?"

"I know she wouldn't," Shorthouse said easily. "She's safe."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, well . . ." He glanced down, and then up, and coloured a little. "Because . . . you know. Because she's a faithful soul, I suppose."

"Yes, indeed," said Miss Lydia. "Very faithful. Was that why you were holding her hand that evening at the Institute—after Cayley was taken

away?"

"Was I?" Shorthouse seemed genuinely surprised. "I didn't remember. Perhaps I was. It was there, I suppose, and I took hold of it. I'd have held on to a charged wire at that moment."

"Dr. Shorthouse," said Miss Lydia, "allow me to tell you that you're riding for a fall if you make a practice of taking hold of women's hands because they 'happen to be there.' My sex doesn't always stay put, you know."

"Don't I know it?" Shorthouse groaned ruefully. The tone was half-humorous, but the hands which were lying on his knees had stiffened, and there was a taut expression of anxiety at the corners of his mouth. "God, I wish sometimes I'd been born without any eyes! I can't help liking women who are pleasant to look at." The eyes in question slid gently up and down Miss Lydia, who laughed.

"You pay for your ride very prettily, young man," she said, "and I'm not so old as to pretend I don't like it. You shall get a lunch out of it, if you like. I think we should all be the better for it, and it must be high time."

But Shorthouse looked up with a worried face. "You know," he said diffidently, "I'm afraid you'll think it awfully rude of me, but the fact is . . . that if you—if you don't want me particularly, I think I ought to be getting back. I haven't looked, but I've no doubt I've got a heap of work this afternoon—patients—which I ought to get on to at once."

"You think you'll doctor nicely—after this?"

Miss Lydia asked, with a slight hardening of tone.

"Very rottenly, probably. But I oughtn't to run away, ought I?" He looked up at her pleadingly. "Put me down anywhere you like, and I'll find my way home. I'm awfully sorry, really."

"All right." Miss Lydia twinkled a little. "If you're so public-spirited we won't stand in the way. The car can do it in a few minutes." She spoke to the chauffeur. "And now tell me what you're up to—medically, I mean. No, not panel patients. I mean, what are you interested in? What do you want to do with all your drugging?"

"I don't want drugs," said Shorthouse. "I want radium." And as the big car swept back to the Suburb he expatiated eagerly upon his ideas for studying the uses of radium in curative medicine, while Miss Lydia listened attentively. "But, of course," he ended with a sigh, "all *that's* done for. This business will about finish me for any real work."

"Well, well, you never know," Miss Lydia remarked cheerfully, as the car pulled up at Shorthouse's door. "Especially with such a devotion to duty as yours. No, no, you needn't protest; I've quite forgiven you for declining my invitation. Good luck to you."

"May I—I needn't say good-bye now, need I?" Shorthouse said, with his hand on the door.

"No—I don't see why you should. I'd like to hear some more about those ideas of yours. Come and dine with me to-morrow—no, Saturday night," said Miss Lydia, handing him her card. "And now

goodbye, for the present."

"Goodbye. And a thousand thanks," the young man said, as he turned away.

"Are you having lunch with me, Rachel?" Miss Lydia asked.

"Can we go round by the Guest House, auntie?" Rachel said. "There are some books I want to pick up." Miss Lydia ordered the car to go to Coburn Rise.

"Rachel," she asked suddenly, as she leaned back on the cushions, "*does* that young man strike you as so deeply devoted to his profession as to refuse a good lunch for the sake of not being half-an-hour late for some very humdrum patients?"

"I don't know," said Rachel, rather puzzled. "He *sounded* keen, didn't he, the way he was talking to you?"

"*That* wasn't patients," said Miss Lydia. "That was research—and Cavendish Square. That's dreams, quite another pair of shoes; and dressing cut thumbs from Golder's Green won't help you to realise them. No, he wanted to stay, and then suddenly he wouldn't—and why wouldn't he? Something—something he suddenly thought of, and couldn't risk. His manner's rather odd, altogether. I'm not sure that young man's not in deeper waters than you or I know. What do you think about it?"

"I'm not sure," Rachel said, "that I know what you mean."

"And you're too polite to call me an old fool for wasting thoughts on a young man who's more than a bit of a charlatan, even if he has got beautiful blue

eyes, eh?" said Miss Lydia. "Well, perhaps you're right. Of course, we don't know that he didn't kill the man after all—though why on earth should he want to? Well, we'll see about it." She relapsed into silence. "At any rate," she said with finality, "he doesn't want to be a psycho-analyst, and that's something at least. Here we are. Be quick, there's a good child."

"Oh, Miss Redford," said a little maidservant in the hall of the Guest House, as Rachel entered, "Mr. Delahaye's rang up twice for you, from his office. The last time was only a few minutes ago. I expect you'd get him now, if you tried."

Chapter XI

DUET IN RICHMOND

Rachel ran straight to the telephone, and asked for the offices of the Bureau for Left-Wing Information. In a few seconds the voice of its secretary sounded in her ear.

"Where *have* you been, Ray?" it said. "I've been trying to get you all the morning."

"At the inquest."

"Ugh!" said the telephone disgustedly, and immediately continued, "I want you to come out."

"What, now?"

"Yes, why not?"

"It's nearly lunch-time," said Rachel. "Let's have lunch together, somewhere. Near Oxford Circus, if you don't mind."

"Lunch be blowed!" said the telephone. "I want you to come *out*. Right out. Richmond, or somewhere."

"Oh! But, Martin, can you?" Rachel began collecting her wits. What an odd creature Martin was! It was weeks since he had had time to go off on casual expeditions; he had hardly, it seemed, had time even to meet her at all; and now he was suddenly deciding that he wanted to go off for a whole afternoon right in the middle of the week. It was not exactly the moment Rachel herself would have chosen, for her own office work had got very much

behindhand with the excitement of the last few days, and she had promised herself to spend the afternoon clearing up some of the most urgent arrears. Still, the thought of an afternoon—and it was going to be a lovely afternoon—alone at Richmond with Martin was worth a little inconvenience to secure; and while the telephone, with an extraordinary mixture of insistence and cajolery, urged her to come now—come this minute—she was elaborating plans for getting away. Eventually they arranged to meet at Waterloo in an hour's time. Rachel, knowing her lover's casual habits with appointments, did not hurry herself unduly, and was astonished to see, when she got to Waterloo, a reproachful figure detach itself from the barrier.

"Oh, Martin, I *am* so sorry!" she said, apology mingling in her voice with delight at seeing him again. He had no hat, as usual when he went walking in the country, and under his ridiculously curly dark hair his clever humorous face looked as attractive as ever. Most people, she knew, called Martin Delahaye ugly, but she was convinced that no technically handsome features could be an improvement on his. As she came up to him, she scanned his face anxiously for signs of his health or mood. He was still pale—not that he was ever rubicund, but his pallor had a yellowish tinge that was not healthy; his eyes were ringed and drawn a little as if he was not sleeping well; and his mouth, at first sight, had that sulky droop to which she had grown so unhappily used of late. But as soon as he saw her, the droop lifted, and turned into the crooked smile

she loved, and his face lit up till he seemed a different man.

"I'm *so* sorry," she said again. "But I'm only ten minutes late."

"I've been here twenty," the unaccountable creature replied, and Rachel gasped. Martin—Martin, the notoriously unpunctual, arriving at a rendezvous ten minutes too soon. Well, if it was a compliment it was a very pretty one.

"How's your inside, Martin?" she asked anxiously.

"Oh, all right, thanks," Martin said, as casually as though there had never been anything wrong with it. "How's yours? It's going to be a jolly afternoon, isn't it?" He might not have had a care in the world, now that she had come.

"Lovely," said Rachel, bewildered, but following the lead. "What luck you could get away. What's happened to all the strikes and things?"

"Och, they're over," said Martin, shrugging his shoulders as though a burden had fallen off them. "Finish. Napoo," he added with emphasis.

"What was it you were doing about them?"

"Oh, nothing of any particular interest. Just a mess-up. People wanting all sorts of information all at once, and no time to get it in. Don't let's talk about work; it's too decent a day. Got your ticket? There's a train in five minutes."

But, the subject of work dismissed, he did not seem particularly to want to talk about anything else. Rachel made a few attempts at conversation, bringing up the chances of Labour at the municipal elec-

tions, about which he appeared to have forgotten, the new play at the Gate Theatre, which he had not seen, and other matters which she thought would interest him; but he only answered monsyllabically, and at last relapsed into a brooding silence, which lasted until they had reached Richmond and climbed out up the narrow streets, past the Star and Garter, and out among the great trees of the Park. It was a glorious afternoon in early autumn; the trees were just tinged with that metallic light which means golden leaves among the green; and by mutual consent they sat down under one of them and stared out into the blue distance which leads to Wimbledon.

Suddenly Martin, who had been sprawling on his face chewing grass, rolled over and looked up into the girl's eyes.

"Ray," he said, "you *are* decent."

Rachel bent down and took his hands in hers. "I'm not," she said, feeling that it didn't much matter what she said. "Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. Just, you are. Letting me —sulk for weeks, and then coming out straight like this when I ask you. Nobody else would. Ray, I'm a horrible rotten pig."

"You aren't," said Rachel, holding his hands tighter. "And I shouldn't care if you were, Martin —dear."

"Oh!" he said, with a sigh of satisfaction; and drawing his own hands away laid his cheek against one of hers. For the first time for weeks his face looked really serene. "You know," he went on after a pause, "I ought to be apologising like hell—

and I can't begin. You won't be nasty enough to me."

"Why should I? You couldn't help it, if you were ill and overworked." She looked down at his face, and a wave of uncontrollable tenderness overcame her; and she slid an arm under his shoulders. "Martin, darling, don't you know I love you? I couldn't help it if you were fifty pigs rolled into one." She tried to gather him close, but he rolled away and sat up with a laughing protest.

"But, foolish child, you're missing a golden opportunity to get a bit of your own back. Look, I'm grovelling on the mat, waiting to be kicked. I'll eat any sort of humble-pie you like, as long as we stay here. Ray, do kick me."

"I won't," she said sturdily. "You're not going to get off so easily, just coming and asking to be kicked because you feel like it. How do I know you won't be just as bad tomorrow?" His face fell, and he looked so genuinely distressed that she laughed. "Martin, you goose, I was only teasing."

"Don't talk about tomorrow," he muttered.

"All right. I won't talk about anything. You shall just sit and say nothing whatever. But if you scowl at me again I'll pull your hair." He dropped on his hands, and presented a thick dark head to his executioner. "It'll only be a small pull, now," she said, twining her fingers in it, and raising his face to hers. "There's more coming."

"Then I won't lie down to have it done!" he cried, jumping suddenly to his feet. "I'll make you chase me for it. Let's walk about, Ray; we'll freeze

if we sit still. And let's talk about anything that comes into our heads. Did I tell you I'd been asked to stand for Sonning?"

"No! How exciting! Will you be able to? What about money?"

Through all that golden afternoon they wandered about the Park and the Common, forgetting tea and forgetting everything else but each other, and ranging in light-hearted chatter over the whole field of thought and experience. It was, as has been said, weeks since Rachel had had her lover to herself in anything like a happy mood; and in the intervals of enjoying herself she looked at him occasionally with an anxious motherly eye to see if he were really better. In spite of his worn and tired look, he showed no trace of fatigue in their wanderings; and mentally he was extremely lively, not to say excited. Occasionally his face would cloud over, as it had clouded at the word "to-morrow," and his mouth would twist as if some recollection had struck him almost with a physical pain; but for the most part he talked all the time, gaily and absurdly, of all the things he intended to do, and all the things that interested him in life. He would not, however, discuss the death of Harold Cayley at all. Rachel, fresh from the previous night's discussion and from the drama of the inquest, was anxious both to enlist his sympathy for Dr. Shorthouse, and to get his opinion on what had really happened at the Institute; but when she brought the subject up he shuddered all over, and would not talk of it. "I wasn't there," he said; "but from all I hear it was beastly.

Don't be a little ghoul, Ray. Leave it alone."

She was only too glad to let him have his choice of conversation, particularly as he was exceptionally lively and amusing; and there was only, for her, one flaw in the afternoon. Martin did not once kiss her. Of course, she told herself, one could not be kissing all the time; but he had always been rather a demonstrative lover, and somewhat to her own shame (for inwardly she was far less modern than she imagined herself to be) she found herself furiously longing, after the lonely weeks, for the feel of Martin's arms round her and the touch of his lips. Once or twice she almost asked him directly, but a mixture of pride and tenderness interfered, and she told herself angrily, with as much force as her honesty could command, that she was a greedy pig, and that Martin's hand slipped through her arm was more than enough. Later, perhaps. . . .

Except for this rose-leaf, however, the afternoon was as perfect as it could be, until the moment when Rachel, prompted by certain inevitable natural yearnings, took out her watch.

"Goodness!" she said. "Look at the time! We shall be frightfully late. Let's get back quickly."

At once the cloud descended. "I don't want to go back," said Martin.

"But, darling, I'm going to the Russells with Tony, after dinner."

"Well, you can go. There's no hurry."

"But I've got to change—I must. And I'm so hungry. They'll all have finished if we don't get back soon!"

"Ray! Please! I don't want to go back."

"But, darling, we can't stay here."

"Why not? Why go back at all? Ray, don't go. I shall be sick if we do."

"Oh, don't be silly." Hunger, as much as anything else, had brought the slight asperity into Rachel's voice; and though he glared at her indignantly, she stuck to her guns. "You *said* you'd been a pig, and I could kick you. Don't be a pig again. Come back and be sensible."

He did not want to; he tried coaxing and indignation and what Rachel called "whining" in order to get her to change her mind; but she would not be moved, and eventually he allowed himself, wrapped in a melancholy silence, to be put into a train at Richmond. Rachel had mentally decided that it was no use giving in to this whim, that Martin must be made to pull himself together and behave like ordinary people, though when she did see him seated opposite her in the carriage, she wondered for a moment whether she had been right. He certainly looked very white, almost green, in the carriage-lamps, and he had huddled himself inside his coat as if he was either ill or very cold.

"Are you feeling sick?" she suggested at last.

"Yes," was all the answer she got.

"You want dinner. It's because you haven't had anything to eat," Rachel said, practically but not perhaps consolingly; and was answered by an indignant groan. After a while, however, the sufferer appeared to resign himself to the inevitable, sat up, and began to talk more naturally. He still looked

very miserable, but Rachel was feeling altogether more confident when they got out at Waterloo, and Martin went to get an evening paper. She was just thinking to herself, with perhaps a little complacency, that it was much better not to give way to one's great desire to spoil Martin, for he really bore up quite well without being spoiled, when one of those chance meetings which the hand of fate sometimes sends utterly destroyed her new happiness. Looking round, she saw little Bernard Robinson, Martin's second-in-command at the Bureau, hovering in the background as if he was undecided whether or no he ought to speak to her. Rachel liked Bernard, who was one of those tremendously faithful though not inspired workers without whom organisations like the Bureau would not continue twelve months in existence; and she signalled to him to join her, which he did, still looking a little worried, as though he had lost his ticket.

"Hullo, Bernard!"

"Hullo, Rachel! Had a nice time?"

"Marvellous, thanks. Haven't had such an afternoon for ages." She began to explain how particularly good it was for Martin to get out into the country, and to commiserate both Robinson and his chief on the amount of time they had had to spend recently on tiresome business, when she caught an odd expression on the little man's face.

"What's the matter, Bernard?" she said.

"I don't think *Martin* need complain," said Robinson, getting rather pink.

"Why?"

"Well. . . ." He looked at her hard for a second, and then seemed to pluck up his courage. "I say, Rachel, aren't you two ever going to get married?"

"Of course we are. Why?"

"Well. . . . I don't want to be nasty, and it's very nice to be engaged, I'm sure. But if he's about with you all the time, *somebody's* got to do his work, haven't they?"

"But. . . ." Rachel stared blankly at him. "What on earth ——?"

"Don't be angry," pleaded the little fellow. "I don't suppose you noticed. But you know—or you *will* know, if you think—that Martin hasn't spent half his time in the office lately, what with coming late, and going out to lunch and not coming back, or going off early in the evening. And he makes appointments, and forgets about them—it isn't fair on any of us, really. Honestly, he's not pulling his weight. Oh, Lord, there he is!" He shied off in obvious fear. "I say, Ray, I don't mean you to say anything to him—but do please think it over. Really, I don't mean to be horrid, but if you'd try and see it from our point of view—I've only just got off, finishing up things."

He darted away, just as Martin came back with the papers. "Here you are—if you insist on going back. What did Bernard want?" he added indifferently.

"Nothing," Rachel lied.

"Nice lad, but he's always fussing over something," said Martin, thereby causing Rachel's blood

to boil within her. But she said nothing; this was not the sort of thing one could discuss in the rattle of a Tube train. She could only sit, in the silence of utter unhappiness, staring at Martin's face. What *could* it mean? Martin lying to her! Martin, all those weeks, hardly ever at the office, and telling Bernard, or letting Bernard believe, that he was out with her! Where could he have been? and what could he have been doing? She sat miserably asking herself these impossible questions during the whole of the half-hour's journey; and when at length they reached Coburn Rise, no one would have judged from either of their faces that they were lovers and had just come home from a happy afternoon in the country.

At Coburn Rise, however, another, and an even worse shock, awaited her. As they entered, and as she had just screwed up her courage to ask Martin about Robinson's statement, a door opened off the square hall, and Miss Jane Forrester, who had obviously been awaiting their arrival, looked out. Her face seemed even grimmer and thinner-lipped than usual.

" Mr. Delahaye," she said, " I should like a word with you in here, if you please." She paused. " To explain," she added, " if you can, something about a bottle which has been missing from one of your drawers *since Monday.*"

There was a curious sound behind Rachel; and, as she turned, she saw Martin, with a face like a sheet, clutching at the back of a chair. In an instant, forgetting her previous trouble, she was by his

side, but he shook off her hand. "It's all right, Ray," he said; and his voice came thickly, as though his throat were very dry. "You keep out of it. Carry on." And without another look at her he stepped through the open doorway, almost as though he were a criminal going to judgment.

Chapter XII

INTERLUDE

Meanwhile, Miss Lydia Redford, deprived of her niece's company, had driven back to a solitary lunch in Queen Anne's Gate, over which she had sat for an unusually long time, pondering the problem of Dr. Shorthouse. All her life she had been interested in young men, particularly young men with a touch of the blarney stone, and on an hour's acquaintance her mind had already begun to revolve plans for helping this particular young man to his heart's desire. Miss Lydia was not rich—at least, not rich enough to have capital to spare for the setting-up of young doctors, deserving or undeserving; but she had a very wide acquaintance among the influential, and knew more than one way of securing a helping hand for anyone in whom she was interested. But if that helping hand were to be secured for Dr. Shorthouse, he must be clear of any complicity in the Cayley case.

"Influential persons" were not likely to bestir themselves for a doctor under suspicion of murder. For Miss Lydia was quite aware that the inquest had not ended matters, and that it was still perfectly possible for Shorthouse to have been the criminal. This possibility, however, she firmly brushed on one side. It did not suit her present purpose for Shorthouse to be a murderer, and therefore he should not be. But it was necessary for the world at large also

to recognise this fact, and how was that to be achieved? After thinking it over, Miss Lydia decided that the only way was to discover the real criminal, and that (having an innate contempt for the police) she herself or such people as she could press into the service would have to do the discovering. Accordingly, as she was an old lady prompt in action, she immediately summoned Sir Eric Pennell to dine with her, with a view to finding out, from someone who was at least distantly connected with the Garden Suburb affair, how the land lay.

An invitation from Miss Lydia Redford was generally considered to be the equivalent of a command, and Sir Eric obediently turned up, very well-dressed and amiable, moving with perfect security on her highly-polished carpet and handling her old and delicate glass with such skill as only Winchester and New College could have taught him; but it was fairly clear that he was performing a social duty. His thoughts were elsewhere; and when Miss Lydia impatiently began to track them, the result startled her so much that she nearly spilt her soup.

"*Marry* her! But, my dear boy, that's surely not necessary."

"Necessary?" Sir Eric came as near a scowl as his soft boyish face could manage. "I'm afraid I don't understand, Miss Redford. Doesn't one marry the girl whom one—cares about?"

"Not *all* of them," Miss Lydia said caustically.

"No, of course not. But you don't understand. This really is the real thing."

"Oh, my dear Eric! It always has been! And

you've never wanted to marry them—at least, not in such a hurry."

"They haven't wanted me to, mostly," Pennell laughed good-temperedly.

"Oh, she wants to marry you, does she?"

"She doesn't understand—not marrying. Or approve of the way some girls go on. You see," he added, flushing a little, "she's *different.* She's—oh, I don't know how to put it! She isn't spoilt; she hasn't lived like—like the people you and I know. She's *fresh*—like a child. And that's partly why——"

"Oh, Lord," Miss Lydia sighed. "And how long have you known this—dewdrop?"

"A week to-morrow."

"Three days before her husband died! And you're proposing to marry her at once! My dear Eric, what *is* your hurry?"

"You don't understand," said Pennell. "She can't be left alone like that, living in that hole of a house. She's got to be looked after. And she's got no people—there's no one to do it but me."

"There," Miss Lydia interrupted, "I must disagree with you. It struck *me,* when I was in that—that Orpington chicken-farm of a place, that there were a good many people quite anxious to look after her."

"You know you're teasing me, Miss Redford," Pennell said patiently. "That's just what she hates, and I hate to have her put up with it. Beastly little swobs putting their filthy fingers all over her! You don't know what it means, Miss Redford, to a girl

to be as beautiful as that when she's poor. Every little toad thinks she ought to be his for the asking! By Jove, when I think of it it makes me want to break their necks! That's partly why she married Cayley, to get some sort of protection against them; but *he* was no good. He never looked after her decently, and he was as mean as hell."

"Oh, was he? And are you going to be generous?"

"Why, I hope so," said Pennell simply. "You don't think I'm stingy, do you?"

"Oh, Eric, dear, what *am* I going to say to your mother when I write?"

"Tell her," Pennell said sturdily, "that I'm going to marry the loveliest girl in the world, who doesn't mind a bit that I haven't any brains, and that if she makes a fuss I'll go straight to Hollywood, and marry the oldest and most expensive vamp I can find! But, Miss Redford," he added after this ultimatum, "why are *you* so opposed?"

"Because, my dear," said Miss Lydia, "your mother's one of my oldest friends, and I've known you since you were a baby, and I don't want to see you rushing into something you'll be sorry for afterwards." And, as young Pennell's face exhibited nothing but a sheep-like obstinacy, she allowed her irritation to master her, and added, "You don't want people to say that you married your wife and took her away so that she shouldn't be suspected of murdering her first husband, do you?"

"Miss Redford!"

"Well," said Miss Lydia, "*somebody* killed him,

didn't they? At least, it seems to be the general opinion."

"But it's preposterous! Who's been making such damnable suggestions?"

"Nobody, that I know of. But they will do, I've no doubt, if you start behaving like a Quixotic baby. You and your income are quite an adequate motive for murder, my dear boy." Then, seeing that Pennell had really been shocked to his soul by her careless suggestion, she relented. "Don't look so tragic, Eric. I didn't say I believed anything of the sort. I only suggested a decent interval, and if you think it over you'll agree with me, for the girl's own sake. No, don't argue. Go home and sleep on it. I wish you'd tell me who *did* kill that Cayley man, though."

"*I* don't know," said Pennell, who obviously did not care, either. "I didn't know anything about him. I suppose the police will find out who it was—that's what they're for, aren't they?"

"I sometimes wonder if anyone knows what they're for, except to regulate the traffic and try and censor my library for me," said Miss Lydia. "Can't you make any suggestions, Eric? Don't you know anybody who disliked him?"

"I'm sorry; I don't think I do. I don't know anybody who liked him, either," the young man added conscientiously.

"No. Neither do I. It's incredible," Miss Lydia reflected, "what a lot of people there are in the world whose death wouldn't grieve anybody—like this Cayley. And yet, if anybody happens to

accelerate it by a few years, there is a terrible stirring-up, and half the world's careers ruined. It seems unbalanced, doesn't it?" But this was too fast for Pennell to follow.

"I don't know what you mean," he said, looking puzzled. "Murder's got to be punished, hasn't it, whoever's got murdered. It wouldn't do to go letting fellows off because they'd only killed people you didn't like."

"I'm not suggesting letting murderers off," said Miss Lydia a trifle impatiently—"not even this one. You may boil him in oil if you know who he is. But if you don't, all this fuss seems to me excessive, for a man like that. Why couldn't he have left a note-book, or something, saying who was going to kill him? Then innocent people might be spared a lot of trouble. I don't see why Mr. Cayley's ghost should be provided with blood-sacrifices."

"If you mean that doctor-fellow when you talk about innocent people," Pennell said, fastening on to the only phrase in the last speech which he understood, "I shouldn't be at all so sure he was innocent. Anyway, he's only himself to thank for what's coming to him. Mixing his prescriptions when he's drunk! That's not the kind of chap one wants to have as a doctor. Of course," he reflected, "the fellow's a bit hairy in the heel, isn't he? You can see at once that he *would* do something of that sort."

"You're very moral, Eric," said Miss Lydia "—and very stupid. I didn't say anything about Dr. Shorthouse. I said I never knew a murder case that

did not make a holocaust of innocent people. . . . Yes, Porritt?"

"If you please, madam," said the maid, "Miss Rachel would like to speak to you on the telephone."

"All right," said Miss Lydia, and went out of the dining-room. Eric Pennell, leaving his fish untasted, sank back into an ecstasy of amorous contemplation, from which he was sharply roused by the return of his hostess, with a grim face and a rather worried manner.

"You ought to be pleased now, Eric," she said, "if you think it's a good idea to avenge murder by making everyone in the neighbourhood as uncomfortable as possible. It appears that some persons are very anxious to say that Martin Delahaye killed Mr. Cayley."

"*Delahaye!*" said the startled young man. "But why on earth?"

"I don't know," said Miss Lydia. "But Rachel's just telephoned to tell me that those two old maids she boards with are spreading some sort of cock-and-bull story. I'm going up there now to find out what it's all about. Eat your fish, Eric; it's getting cold."

"But surely"—Pennell was still gaping in astonishment—"there can't be anything in it. *Delahaye* ——"

"I don't know," said Miss Lydia again. "But—I'm rather worried. Rachel's only a child, of course, and it's her young man. But I don't think she's given to panic, generally, and she certainly sounded in a panic on the telephone. It looks as though

something odd had happened—but I can only wait till I see her. I've ordered the car round, as soon as Holmes can get his coat on, which will take him half an hour at least. I wish I hadn't got to keep the child waiting so long." She frowned restlessly.

"Can't I do anything?" Pennell asked.

"You can finish your dinner, my dear," Miss Lydia replied. "And then, if you like, you can go and fetch Tony. I understand he's gone round to the William Russells, and they aren't on the telephone. Tell him to come to that Guest House place as quickly as he can. I think Rachel's brother ought to be there."

Chapter XIII

SECOND MURDERER?

Miss Lydia drove up to Medstead in considerably more distress of mind than she had admitted to her visitor. Rachel had told her no details over the 'phone, merely saying that the Misses Forrester had been saying 'horrible things' against Martin, and had actually suggested sending for the police; but there was something in the agitated tone of the girl's voice and the way in which she implored her aunt please to come now—at once, that convinced Miss Lydia that here was something more than idle gossip to be dealt with. There was fear in Rachel's voice rather than the more natural indignation; and why should Rachel be afraid, unless Martin had done something—something, at any rate, which could give these people a handle against him? "This has got to be cleared up at once," thought Miss Lydia, now far hotter on the trail than she had been an hour back. For Rachel was her own flesh and blood, and she was a clannish old lady, to whom her own flesh and blood meant more, in the long run, than the most attractive of strangers. In this moment, Dr. Shorthouse's problems were as though they had never been.

As the car moved towards Medstead she ran over the situation in her mind. What could Martin Delahaye have been doing? He had been engaged

to Rachel now for about six months, sorely against the will of the latter's father, who regarded him quite simply as another of those damned Bolsheviks who were after his (Mr. Redford's) money. Miss Lydia had backed young Delahaye, both because he was Rachel's choice and because she regarded her nephew as incurably stupid; but she had never really cared for him, thinking him, in her secret heart, an unreliable, opinionated cub. There was no denying his brains; he had done excellently at Cambridge, and could probably have made himself a brilliant career in some intellectual calling; but while at Cambridge he had become a Socialist, and as soon as he had gone down had immediately associated himself with this Bureau of Left-Wing Information, about which Miss Lydia knew nothing and cared less. He was unreliable in the matter of appointments and social engagements; he would argue, cleverly, perhaps, but none the less wrong-headedly, from Miss Lydia's point of view; and he did not pay her the deference which she expected from young men She had heard that he could be charming; but, if that were so, it was not a kind of charm which she particularly liked. But, when all was said, she was forced to admit that none of the faults she saw in him particularly pointed to his being a murderer or connected with murder. Rude and opinionated men are not particularly more prone to murder their fellows than amiable and soft-spoken ones. It was true that, as far as she could observe, Martin, for the last two months, had been more temperamental and less amiable than usual. Rachel had been see-

ing less of him; and the meetings which had taken place seemed to have disturbed rather than pleased her. Miss Lydia herself had hitherto put this down to the delay of their marriage, which they had been postponing in the hope that Mr. Redford's opposition would collapse; she held very strongly that engagements were very bad for young people, and the worse the longer they lasted. Now, she wondered whether anything more serious could have been the matter. But murder! That was too much more serious altogether. In any event, she reflected fiercely, if Martin Delahaye had been doing anything calculated to hurt Rachel in any way, the skin should be flayed from his body. *Rachel* was not to be classed with Harold Cayley, in the category of persons who could be injured without disturbing the world. Rachel was to be protected, and, if necessary, avenged. And, so thinking, she found herself at the door of the Guest House.

"Miss Forrester?" she demanded of the agitated little maid who answered her ring.

"Miss Forrester's engaged, mum, please," said the maid.

"Pooh!" said Miss Lydia, in a voice plainly audible to a small interested knot of persons who were standing in the square hall; and marched in.

"Where is Miss Forrester?" she demanded in her best Guards manner.

"Please, mum, in her room," said the maid, trotting through the hall and placing herself gallantly between this truculent old lady and the stairs.

"Then take me to her room," said Miss Lydia.

The watchers in the hall began to buzz excitedly; and the little maid began a muffled protest of which "wasn't to be disturbed" were the only words that could clearly be heard.

"Nonsense!" said Miss Lydia. "My name is Redford. I am Miss Redford's aunt. Kindly tell Miss Forrester that I wish to speak to her immediately!"

What the maid's next line of defence would have been is not known; for at that moment a door at the top of the stairs opened, and Miss Forrester herself, who had presumably heard either the buzz or Miss Lydia's last speech, came out and stared coldly at the new arrival. Behind her, and about the level of her elbow, the pink, alarmed face of her sister appeared.

"May I ask," said Miss Forrester, "what is the meaning of this?"

"My name," Miss Lydia repeated, "is Redford. I am Rachel Redford's aunt, and I have come to have a few words with you in private."

"Really——" began Miss Forrester, who had observed and disliked Miss Lydia at the Institute. "I must say——"

"Well, say it in private, whatever it is," said Miss Lydia. "Goodness me, we don't want to have a discussion with half Medstead looking on!" As she spoke, she had advanced up the stairs; and the onlookers, to their delight, saw Miss Forrester, who had been standing firmly in front of her door, step, almost as if mesmerised, to one side, while Miss Lydia passed through. Then she hastily followed

her, and closed the door against the curious eyes and ears.

"Well!" said Miss Lydia. "What's all this about?"

She gazed round the room, taking in the scene. By the fire stood a large, forbidding armchair, in which it was obvious that Miss Forrester had been sitting, like a *juge d'instruction,* until a moment before. Her sister was perched on the table, with her feet tapping against its legs and her beads against the inkstand; and by the table, on a hard Windsor chair, sat Martin Delahaye, with his head bent down, digging his penknife in and out of the wood. Rachel sat huddled in a far corner, and at the sight of her face Miss Lydia felt all her worst fears confirmed. Rachel would not have looked like that, so white and frightened, unless there had been something to fear.

"I must confess," said Miss Forrester, resuming her judgment, "I cannot imagine what business ——"

"My dear madam," Miss Lydia said sharply, seating herself in the only chair left, "I am Miss Redford's aunt, and it's my business to protect her. I gather you have been making remarkable statements about her fiancé."

"Do you suggest they are not true?" said Miss Forrester.

"I don't suggest anything, till I know what they are."

"Mr. Delahaye," said Miss Forrester, with an expression which said, "I would have spared you, you

foolish woman, but you insisted on having it," " Mr. Delahaye, on the day before the murder, had a bottle of poison in his bedroom drawer. By the afternoon of the next day it had disappeared! "

" Had a *what?* " said Miss Lydia, utterly taken aback by this information.

" A bottle of strychnine—in his bedroom drawer."

" No," said Martin; but he said it in so low a tone that Miss Lydia did not hear. Her head was whirling with surprise, and to gain time she turned on Miss Forrester.

" May I ask," she said, " what evidence you have for this statement? "

" My sister," Miss Forrester said. Miss Lydia turned round to stare at the lady in question, who promptly put two beads in her mouth and began to suck them. " My sister was told about the bottle by one of the maids. She asked me what she should do about it, and I decided to speak to Mr. Delahaye for his carelessness in leaving such things about in unlocked drawers. By next day, however, it was gone."

" Procrastination " muttered Miss Millicent, " thief of time." She spoke rather thickly, owing to the two beads; but Miss Lydia recognised her voice, and swung round on her.

" Oh! " she said. " You're the woman who talked to me at that party, and who wanted no concealment! I suppose that's the name you give to prying in other people's drawers! "

" I wasn't prying! " said Miss Millicent with indignation. " People are so careless! The most ex-

traordinary things get left in drawers. Why, it might have poisoned us all, if it had got into the soup!"

"Soup!" said Miss Lydia. "May I ask if you generally make soup in your boarders' bedrooms?"

"It is very easy to be insulting," said Miss Forrester coldly, "but may I remind you that what you call 'prying' is a trifling matter compared with—being in unlawful possession of poison!" She had obviously intended to end the sentence differently, and Miss Lydia's face darkened a little.

"Well, Martin," she said to the downbent figure at the table, "what about it? *Did* you have poison in your room?"

"Yes," Martin muttered. "But it wasn't strychnine."

"What was it, then?" Miss Forrester snapped.

"I've told you ten times I don't know!"

"Nor where it came from?"

"I won't say."

"And you expect me to believe ——"

"Stop a moment!" said Miss Lydia. "I want to know what this is all about. What did you want poison for, Martin?"

"To . . . to . . ." With an effort Martin raised his eyes and looked at her. "To chuck my hand in."

"Do you mean you were going to kill yourself?" Martin nodded. "Why?"

"I . . . I don't exactly know. I mean, I was feeling beastly—inside all rotten, and everything going wrong. I thought . . . nobody

would mind much if I—didn't go on." Rachel made a faint sound, and he looked in her direction with the ghost of a smile. "I suppose it was rather a poor sort of idea. I didn't do it, anyway."

"You changed your mind?" from Miss Forrester.

"Yes."

"Just on the night Mr. Cayley was murdered?"

"Yes."

"Where is that bottle now, Mr. Delahaye?"

"I threw it away, in Medstead Ponds."

"Having *no further use* for it, I suppose?" said Miss Forrester with meaning.

"No," said Martin.

At this moment came another interruption. There was a timid knock at the door, and the little maid, with her mouth and eyes round with excitement, put her head in at the door. "Please, ma'am," she said, "the police."

"Madam!" said Miss Lydia, springing to her feet, "You don't mean to say that you've called the police in!"

"It was my duty," said Miss Forrester, going to the door. "These very unsatisfactory statements must be cleared up. Come with me, Millicent."

"Oh, dear," said little Miss Millicent. "I wish your duty wasn't always so unpleasant, Jane." She made the last charge purely as a statement of a regrettable fact, and followed her sister out, leaving the two Redfords alone with the young man.

Miss Lydia stood by the table, a prey to increasing perplexity. When his accusers had gone, Martin Delahaye looked up at Rachel with an imploring

glance, which her aunt would have expected to bring the girl instantly to his side; but she appeared not to notice it. True, she was not looking at him, but gazing out of the window with a white, strained face; but Miss Lydia would have sworn she had deliberately turned her head away. It was very odd. However, nothing was to be gained by keeping silence.

"Martin," she said, after a minute or two, "tell us all about it, quickly, before they come back."

"There's nothing to tell," the young man said dully, "except what I've said already. I *did* have some stuff—I don't think it was strychnine, but I don't know what it was—and I did mean to kill myself. . . . Or half-mean—*I* don't know. But I thought better of it, and I threw the stuff away."

"Where did you get it from?"

"I told you, I'm not going to say. What's it matter where I got it from? I didn't kill Cayley with it, and that's all that matters. Do you think I did?" Martin asked. "I swear I didn't, on anything you like. Don't you believe me?" He spoke to Miss Lydia, but his eyes were on Rachel. She turned her head, and gave a sort of a half-nod; but the effort was so evident that Martin flushed scarlet, and buried his head on the table. At this moment the door opened, and Miss Forrester, her two cheekbones flaming red, looked in.

"Will you please come this way, Mr. Delahaye?" she said; and Martin rose and followed her, without another look at either of the women.

"What's the matter, Rachel?" Miss Lydia rose and crossed to her niece's side. "Why are you so frightened, my dear? There's no proof that Mr. Cayley drank any of this ridiculous bottle—whatever there was in it."

"I don't know. . . . That isn't all," Rachel said in an unhappy, perplexed voice. "Miss Forrester—before you came in—said she had other—other things to say."

"Well, what were they? Why didn't she say 'em to me?"

"She didn't say them at all. She wouldn't. She said . . . she wanted . . . to spare me," said Rachel, very low.

"Old brute!" said Miss Lydia. "Tormenting you like that, and pretending it was kindness. I know that sort of woman. But, my child, if you *don't* know what it is why get in such a panic? Don't make bogies for yourself. I daresay it's nothing."

"I . . . I . . . I don't believe it is," Rachel got out at last, with great difficulty.

"Why not? For goodness sake, child, tell me what's the matter, and don't sit there muttering! What has Martin been doing?"

Slowly, and with great effort, Rachel got out the story of her meeting with Bernard Robinson on Waterloo platform, and the conversation which had so disturbed her. Since that had taken place, she had had ample opportunity to imagine all its possible implications, and her misery and perplexity had increased rather than diminished. It was so unlike

Martin. Martin casual, forgetful, even rude, she could understand easily; but Martin deliberately lying, and to her as well as to everyone else, over a period of weeks, seemed so unnatural that she could hardly believe it was Martin and not somebody else, some complete stranger. And before she had had time to adjust herself in any way came Miss Forrester, with her insinuations and her hints at a dark secret which Rachel ought to be "spared." What *had* Martin been doing, all those many hours when he said he was kept at the office? All this, and much more, Rachel, once she had found her tongue, poured out to Miss Lydia, in a condition not far removed from hysteria.

"Well, have you asked him what he was doing?" Miss Lydia cut in at last.

"No . . . I—I couldn't."

"So you're free to put the most damaging construction on it all. Rachel, my dear, I think you're being a bit of a goose. What's wrong with you is that you've been loyal to Martin all this while, instead of giving him the smacking he deserved, and now you're suffering from a reaction. But there's no need to rush to the opposite extreme, before you've even heard what he's got to say. I suppose your idea is that he may have been carrying on with some other woman—Mrs. Cayley, perhaps—when he ought to have been with you?"

Rachel was silent. She did not want anything put into words, though it was obvious that the idea had crossed her mind.

"Well," said Miss Lydia, "it's certainly possible.

But I can't see that there's any need to jump to conclusion—especially unpleasant conclusions. And as to that old cat, my advice to you is not to believe a word she says until it's proved from somewhere else. Never take a spinster's word, my dear—even mine. We've far too little outlet for our imaginations. Why, whatever's happening?" She had moved to the window as she spoke, and, looking out, she saw a taxi standing at the door of the Guest House, and two police-constables, accompanied by Martin Delahaye, apparently about to enter. "Rachel," she said, "Martin's going back with them to the police-station."

"What!" With one leap Rachel was out of her chair, and through the doorway, whence she rushed down the stairs and across the hall, crying "Martin! Martin!" as if he were about to be hanged before her eyes. Miss Lydia, following at a more leisurely pace, saw her rush up to Delahaye and catch him by the hands. A whispered conversation followed, and lasted a few seconds before one of the policemen put a stop to it, and handed Martin into the cab. They drove off into the darkness just as Miss Lydia reached the gate, and was nearly knocked down by her great-nephew, arriving at full speed.

"I say!" said Tony, in a voice that was a perfect mixture of commiseration and excitement, "what on earth's all this? Are they *arresting* Martin?"

"No, not yet," Rachel said. "They're going to detain him while they make enquiries. But the policeman says—if he doesn't answer he *will* be

arrested."

"For—for *Cayley?*" Tony asked in amazement.

"Yes—for killing Mr. Cayley. But, Tony, you—you don't think he did?"

"Why, of course not, you ass. What's eating you?" said Tony, more surprised than ever. "Of course he didn't do it. But, I say, what a chance!"

"What for?" enquired Miss Lydia, wondering whether her great-nephew had suddenly gone mad.

"Why," said Tony, "Wilson!"

Chapter XIV

STAR'S ENTRANCE

"We can't discuss this in the street," Miss Lydia had said. "And I am not going to stop in that woman's house, if you gave me a thousand pounds. Go and get your clothes, Rachel. You're spending the night with me, and then we'll see what to do with you." But in spite of her contemptuous words, she went back into the house herself as soon as Rachel had departed, and forced herself again upon Miss Forrester, with whom she had a brief interview. When she came out, her face was rather grave, and she looked as though she was thinking hard. They drove back to Queen Anne's Gate almost in silence.

"Tony," said Miss Lydia, when they were safely seated before the fire, and Rachel was relunctantly consuming the food which her aunt had ordered ("Rubbish!" said Miss Lydia. "If you don't want your dinner I want the rest of mine; and I won't have you languishing with inanition in *my* house"). "Tony, tell me about this Mr. Wilson of yours."

"He's the most wonderful detective in the world!" was Tony's lyrical opening. "He's solved hundreds of cases that have stymied the regular police. For instance, there was that time when ——"

"Yes, yes. I don't want a list of his cases. I want to know what sort of man he is."

"One of the best," said Tony, succinctly.

"Does he get on with the police? Why isn't he a policeman?"

"Because he was infernally treated!" Tony almost shouted. "He was turned out of Scotland Yard, when he was the best man they'd ever had there, just because some little rat of a politician didn't like his face![1] Everybody in the police knows it, and they'd do anything they can to make it up to him. So he always gets just what he wants—there's no Lestrade business about him. And he's absolutely first-class about finding anything out."

"If he's as good as all that," Miss Lydia reflected, "he's likely to come too expensive for any of us—if Martin *is* arrested."

"Do you think he will be?" Rachel asked anxiously.

"It's no use our being ostriches," said Miss Lydia, with a studied lightness. "They haven't arrested anybody yet, and I believe their nature abhors a vacuum."

"You needn't bother about the money," Tony encouraged her. "Mr. Wilson gets such heaps of people coming to him that he can just pick and choose what interests him. And he doesn't need to charge more than people can pay."

"And you think we—Martin would interest him?"

"*I* know him," said Tony, grandly. "I think

[1] Tony, though correct enough in his general impression, was wrong on his facts. Wilson's departure from Scotland Yard was quite voluntary. See *The Death of a Millionaire*, by G. D. H. and M. Cole.

he'd do it for me."

"Thank you. May I use your name, then?" Miss Lydia asked with a smile.

"Ye-es. Of course, auntie, if you like. But wouldn't it be better if ——"

"If you approached him. No, Tony. I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I don't think it would. You see, I don't suppose even your great Mr. Wilson lives on air. Somebody's got to be responsible for his fees, and I don't somehow see your father paying. I'll go and see him in the morning, unless we have any more news. And now, I think, we'd better all go to bed. We shall do no good by sitting about and talking. Off with you, Rachel."

"Thank you so much, auntie," Rachel whispered, "for—for going to Mr. Wilson. It's frightfully good of you."

"Stuff!" said Miss Lydia. "Your young man's obviously got to have the best chance he can get."

"It's awfully good of you, all the same," Rachel repeated. "And—auntie—I'm sorry I was so silly—this evening. I couldn't understand—everything happening at once—and Martin not telling me. I didn't think there might be any other explanations. Of course . . . Martin ——" She stopped, and looked perplexed. The sight of Martin being actually carried off by the hounds of the law had roused her feelings so much as almost to destroy her doubts—but not quite. "Anyway," she said, determined to be comforted, "it couldn't possibly be anything of—*that* sort."

"Bless you," said Miss Lydia. "Go to sleep."

But after they had gone she remained for a long time sitting in her chair, and staring with a worried face into the embers.

* * * * * * *

Next morning, at half-past nine precisely, a tall man in the middle forties arrived at his office in Charing Cross, and summoned his clerk. , " I'm expecting a Miss Redford in a quarter of an hour, Jevons," he said. " I can't see anybody until she's gone—say, not before eleven. And bring me the stuff I asked you to get about that Garden Suburb poisoning case."

Mr. Henry Wilson, once of Scotland Yard, was not a man to whom passers-by would have given more than a casual glance in the street; and, if they had, they would have noticed no more than that he had a competent and intelligent face, belonging to that great majority of faces which are neither good nor bad looking, and that he was obviously a professional worker of some sort. Nor, had they been privileged to enter his office, would they have seen anything out of the ordinary. It might have been anybody's office; and the man at the table, glancing rapidly through the correspondence and press-cuttings which Jevons had laid out for him, might have been anybody. They might, perhaps, have found a mild interest in the fact that he took no notes from the newspapers which he read, and that, having read them, he leaned back in his chair, stretched out his legs, put the tips of his fingers together, and closed his eyes. And, even then, he looked more like a Civil Servant asleep than a great detective at work.

In point of fact, Wilson was not asleep; he was thinking about the Cayley case, which Tony, full of delighted importance, had asked him the day before to take up. But his conclusion was the distinctly unspectacular one that there was nothing to be done about this case until some more information was forthcoming. As far as the newspapers went anybody might have murdered Harold Cayley—if indeed he had been murdered—and the only emergent fact was that the one man who had acted suspiciously had apparently been cleared. "Apparently," said Wilson to himself, observing that the clearing of Dr. Shorthouse was not at all complete, at least not unless there were more behind it than the report of the inquest stated. But his thoughts went no further. He did not believe in making bricks without straw, nor psychological deductions about persons of whom one knew nothing; and when he heard the bell ring in his outer office, he sat up, set a chair for Miss Lydia, and ordered her to be admitted at once.

She came in, rather more nervous than she appeared on the surface. A private detective was something quite unknown to her, and a telephone conversation with her own lawyers, who were inclined to be very superior about the whole thing and particularly about private detectives, who they rather suggested were only a high class of police informers, had not reassured her. But the easy ordinariness of Wilson's office was a great comfort; and so was the unobtrusive calm of the man who rose to greet her. He might have been—well, any-

body—say the bank manager; and it was with calm perfectly restored that she sank into the chair he drew forward. She was not past appreciating the fact that he did not force his clients to sit facing the light.

"Good-morning, Miss Redford," he said. "It is about this Garden Suburb affair, your nephew tells me?" He laid his hand on the pile of cuttings.

"Yes," said Miss Lydia. "My niece's fiancé, Mr. Delahaye, has been taken up in connection with it. That is what I have come to you about."

"Do you mean he has been arrested? That he is charged with the crime?"

"They don't call it that," said Miss Lydia. "They *call* it 'detained pending enquiries.' But I should say, from the look of things, that they certainly mean to arrest him."

Miss Lydia reported the story of the poison bottle, as she had heard it from Miss Forrester on the previous evening, together with Martin's explanation, as far as it went.

"Yes," said Wilson, opening his eyes suddenly. He had been leaning back, in his usual attitude, with his eyes closed and his finger-tips pressed together. "He was going to kill himself—and then he decided not to. Why was he going to kill himself?"

"I don't know," said Miss Lydia. "But I know what will be said."

"Yes?"

"That he had fallen in love with Mrs. Cayley."

"Oh! Any evidence of that?"

"The woman," said Miss Lydia, "who runs that

boarding-house told me privately that Mr. Delahaye had been seen hanging about the Cayleys' house. I presume it's some servants' gossip."

"How often? And when?"

"Oh, two or three times, during the past fortnight. He had taken her back to her house, as if they had been out together, and had then said good-night to her at great length."

"I see," said Wilson. "Well, that's no doubt regrettable, if he was engaged to another girl; but not, I feel, so uncommon that we need presume murder—if that's all."

"It isn't all," said Miss Lydia. "Mr. Wilson, I'm now telling you something which, as far as I can gather, the police don't know, though I suppose they will shortly. This young man has been engaged to my niece for six months. Up till about ten weeks ago all went well. Since then—I must say he has behaved very oddly. Rachel has not complained, but I know for a fact that he has hardly seen her at all, and been very unpleasant and off-hand when he has. The excuse he has given is that he's been ill—some sort of stomach trouble, I think—*and* that he's been overworked at his office. Well, the point is that he hasn't been at his office. Rachel met one of his colleagues last night, and heard that for some weeks past he has hardly been there at all."

"And you think," said Wilson, "that on these occasions he was really with Mrs. Cayley?"

"I don't *know*," said Miss Lydia. "I can only guess. Why else should he have lied to my niece about where he'd been?"

"I see," said Wilson, and paused a moment to think before putting his next question, which referred to the circumstances of Cayley's death. "Then Mr. Delahaye was not actually there when Cayley died," he said when he had heard the story.

"No," said Miss Lydia. "He'd gone some time before. But he came back afterwards, for my nephew saw him."

"Oh! You don't know why he came back, I suppose?"

"I don't. I don't think my nephew asked. He said he didn't seem well, and only wanted to be left alone."

"I see," said Wilson again. "Now, Miss Redford, there is only one other question I want to ask, and I'm afraid you may find it painful. Are you certain that you want me to take this case up?"

"You mean ——?" said Miss Lydia, faltering a little.

"You see," said Wilson, "I am not an advocate, or a solicitor. I don't undertake the defence of cases, but their investigation. And I have to follow —where the investigation leads."

"You are trying to tell me that you think Mr. Delahaye—guilty. Is that what you mean?"

"No," said Wilson. "I have not investigated. I cannot at this point say who is guilty or who is not. But I think you yourself realise that it is a possibility. What do you want me to do?"

The old lady summoned all her courage. "Mr. Wilson," she said, "you need not be tactful with me. I have lived a long time in this world, and I

am used to shocks. I am anxious that Martin Delahaye should be proved innocent of this charge. But if he is guilty ——"

"If he is?" Wilson prompted her.

"If he is, I would rather . . . yes, for my niece's sake too, I would rather it were known. For the young man himself, Mr. Wilson, I don't care a snap of my fingers. I am not a philanthropic woman, and I can't pretend to feel deeply for anyone who does not belong to me. But for Rachel's sake, if this charge is untrue, I will spend every penny I have to get it disproved. And if . . . if it *is* true, she had better have the shock now, while she is young and may get over it. Does that satisfy you, Mr. Wilson? And will you tell me now, without any beating about the bush, whether you think he is guilty?"

"There is no need to beat about the bush," Wilson replied, giving her a glance of appreciation. "On what you have told me, I could not possibly say anything but that there is some strong evidence to meet—which can be no news to you, or you would not have come to me. But there's no necessity that this should mean guilt. If I take it on, I must see the young man himself, and, if possible, get him to confide in me fully. Then I must look up the Crown people, and try and find out what evidence they've got, if any. Then we shall know where we stand."

"Does that mean that you will take it on?"

"If you want me," said Wilson gravely, "after what I have said, I will." His manner was so earnest that Miss Lydia felt as though she were be-

ing asked to condemn Martin Delahaye to immediate death, but she held on her course.

"I shall be very glad," she said, "if you will."

"Good!" said Wilson, his voice instantly changing. "Then let us get to business as quickly as possible. Who are Mr. Delahaye's lawyers?"

"None," said Miss Lydia. "I asked my own man to take it up, but he's too proud. He recommended Hirst and Trumbles, whoever they are."

"Quite sensible people," Wilson approved. "I should say they'd do it very well. If you'll let me instruct them, I'll go up to Medstead as their representative. It's the easiest way of getting into touch with the young man. If they haven't arrested him, by the way, I should take that as meaning they're none too sure of a case yet. But we'll have to see what sort of stuff they've got hold of, of course. What sort of young fellow is Mr. Delahaye, by the way? Give me your impressions."

"A clever, opinionated young goose!" Miss Lydia said sharply, venting a little pent-up anxiety on the absent Martin, of whose history she then gave a brief sketch. "Sincere enough, I daresay; but silly and wrongheaded in his opinions, and lately he's been childishly rude. I should say he was very unbalanced; one day he'll be up in the air over some ridiculous Socialist victory somewhere, and the next hardly fit to speak to! He can be charming enough when he likes, I believe; and I don't think he's a bad boy, if he had any sense or any manners."

"You don't think, then," said Wilson, mentally taking thirty per cent off this somewhat coloured

view, " that he did this thing? "

" Mr. Wilson," said Miss Lydia, becoming deeply serious again, " don't ask me that. I should have said it was the most unlikely thing in the world. But I've seen too much of the folly of men where a beautiful woman is concerned to make rash statements. This Mrs. Cayley is one of the loveliest creatures I've ever seen in my life. A young friend of mine is besotted about her on a week's acquaintance, and was ready to knock me down only yesterday because I suggested he shouldn't be in too much of a hurry to marry her. With a woman like that, Mr. Wilson, I daren't say."

" Thank you," said Wilson. " And now, perhaps, I had better be getting to work. As far as the police are concerned, it seems from what you've told me that they had two strings, Mr. Delahaye and this Dr. Shorthouse; and they've now dropped Dr. Shorthouse ——"

" After manhandling him shockingly," Miss Lydia put in in defence of her late protegé.

" At the inquest, yes," said Wilson. " That was grossly unprofessional behaviour on the Coroner's part. But it doesn't really affect the evidence, you know, however it may react on the sympathies of the spectators. However, I daresay there's nothing in it. Good afternoon, Miss Redford. I suppose I may have a word with your nephew and niece some time. Thank you. I'll let you know as soon as ever there's anything to report."

Chapter XV

BUSINESS AT THE YARD

" I think it's a case of accuser first and defendant afterwards," said Wilson to himself when Miss Lydia had gone. " If this fellow thinks lying's a good way to get out of a hole we'd better confront him with all the truth we can get hold of. Get me Inspector Blaikie, Jevons."

Inspector Blaikie was Wilson's own old colleague, and was always extremely willing to provide him with any information he needed. A very few words informed Wilson that Inspector Calcott was in charge of the Cayley case, and to Inspector Calcott he accordingly made his way.

" Confound you, Wilson! " Calcott cried cheerfully as the ex-superintendent entered. " Are you here spoiling sport again? The last case I had you made a pretty mess of."

" Leggatt and Watson," Wilson agreed. " And very grateful you were too. You'd have got into some nice hot water if you'd arrested Leggatt for murdering his own daughter, when she was safe at her aunt's all the time."

" Oh, you can't say we don't take a snub nicely," Calcott replied. " But it's quite another pair of shoes if you're going to make a habit of it. Damn it, you might remember that your late colleagues have got to live, too! "

"You don't move me a bit," Wilson said with a grin. "You're timeworkers and draw your pay and pensions whether or no you deliver the goods. I'm a poor devil of a piece-worker, paid by the job; and I have to earn my pay."

"I can't see why you should earn it at *my* expense," Calcott growled at him. "However, have it your own way. Pull the evidence to pieces. I suppose you know already what it is."

"I know you're not satisfied with it, whatever it is," said Wilson, sitting down. "Why not?"

"You're being a sharp fellow, aren't you?" Calcott replied. "We *are* arresting your man, if that's what you're counting on."

"For having a bottle of poison in his possession, eh? *Was* it strychnine, by the way?"

"That," said Calcott, "we don't know for certain. When that Miss Forrester sent her news to the station, she said 'poison' simply; but by the time our men got to the house and went off with Delahaye, it had turned into 'strychnine.' That may have been a bright embellishment of her own—again, it may not. There wasn't anything in the bottle to show."

"The bottle? Have you got the bottle?"

"Yes. Fished it up out of Medstead Ponds, and the devil of a lot of fishing we had to do to get it. But it's the bottle, all right. There was a queer sort of chip in one corner of it, and Delahaye and the old woman both recognised it."

"Oh! But it was empty, you say."

"Stark empty," said the inspector.

"Cork in it?"

"No. No cork there at all."

"So it may have been thrown in full or empty, for all you know."

"Marvellous, Holmes. The contents, in fact, may be inside Cayley, or at the bottom of the pond, or anywhere else in the world."

"What about the label?"

"Torn or soaked off, all but a bit. There was a P O I still to be seen, so it looks as though it had had poison of some sort in it, but what there's no knowing."

"It was Medstead Ponds where he said he'd thrown it, wasn't it?"

"Yes," said the inspector; "and that's about the one bit of truth he's let out in the whole affair, as far as I can see. Must have been off his guard. He didn't even come clean about throwing it in."

"How's that?"

"Why, he *said* he chucked it in next morning, on his way from the office. But I've timed it, and he couldn't have. Medstead Ponds is a long way out of his way; and if he'd gone round by there he'd have arrived back a good half hour later than he did."

"When do you think he threw it away, then?"

"Well, there's obviously no proving that," Calcott said. "The most obvious time to throw it away was the night before, after he'd left the Institute. He'd have had plenty of time, then; but of course we can't say."

"When did he leave the Institute, then?"

" Quarter to nine or thereabouts. That's the main point in his favour, up to the present, that he'd gone long before Cayley died, and the poison, according to the doctors, could only have been taken a few minutes before it had effect. Of course, he may have given him a pill and just gone away—or got someone else to hand it to him. But it's a point for what it's worth."

" Humph! " said Wilson. He remembered that, according to Miss Lydia, the young man had in fact been at the Institute very late in the evening, so that this " point " was not really a point at all. Sooner or later the police would have to be informed of this, but at the moment he was seeking, not giving information.

" So," he said, " Delahaye had some poison in his drawer. You don't know what it was and he won't say where he got it. It was there the day Cayley died, and gone by the following evening. You've found its bottle, empty, in the place where Delahaye says he put it, but he has probably lied about the time he put it there. And it may have been empty when it was thrown in. Is that your case? "

" You know it's not," the inspector snorted. " You don't suppose we'd make a case out of such flimsy stuff as that. You've surely heard that Delahaye was completely bowled over by Mrs. Cayley? "

" I'd heard he'd been meeting her," said Wilson; " but nothing quite as strong as that."

" Well, you may take it from me it's true. We've got a good deal more on that point since we first began, and all of it pretty damaging. It seems to

have begun about a couple of months ago, or a bit more, with some chance meeting, after which there were a good many, mostly in town. Delahaye didn't go much to the house, though during the last fortnight he'd been there two or three times, taking Mrs. Cayley home, and saying good-night, I gather, for an enormous time. This much I got from a nasty little Paul Pry of a maid the Cayley's have, who didn't know the gentleman's name, but recognised his photograph. That, and the fact that Cayley was away all the evenings that he came up, seems to me pretty much of an indication that they didn't want it known."

"They? Was Mrs. Cayley reciprocating, then?"

The inspector made a gesture. "I'm blowed if I know. That young woman's too much for me. Looks as though butter wouldn't melt in her mouth, and speaks as pretty and helpful as they make 'em, but she doesn't give you a ha'porth more information than you've paid for, for all that. I went to see her twice without getting a word about Delahaye; then this morning I taxed her with it direct, and she said, of course that was so, but she hadn't thought it worth mentioning! Cool as a cucumber. She even admitted she'd been to Brighton with the young man—of course, that came from outside too, or I should never have heard it from her. But, if you please, they stayed at separate hotels, and it was quite a homey little party!" Wilson laughed at the inspector's disgusted face. "Oh, you may laugh. It's all very well, but how the hell are we to know where we are? Of course, she must have recipro-

cated, to the extent of going out with him night after night; but *that* doesn't carry you any way."

"Didn't Cayley himself have anything to say to all this?"

"Well, I don't know. Who are you to believe? Maid says there were frightful scenes. Mrs. Cayley says, nothing of the sort. Cayley was a bit grumpy occasionally, but he always was when she went out by herself. Delahaye ain't saying nuffin, and Cayley, he's dead. You may take your choice. Myself, I think she'd pretty well taken the measure of Cayley's foot, and that if he did make a row he didn't get the best of it. And I should say *she* was fairly calm about Delahaye, too. But that's conjecture, at the best of it."

"And Delahaye, you say, denies it all?"

"He *did*. What he may say now I don't know; he's probably thinking out some fresh fairy-story. But you may take it from me that he can't possibly deny it. There's too much evidence, and from too many people. Whether he'd fallen for her hard or soft, he was dancing attendance pretty steadily; and, as he'd a girl of his own—and a nice girl, too, from all I hear—it was almost certainly serious. But you can get all that from him, no doubt."

"I was just coming to that," Wilson said. "I suppose there'll be no difficulty about my seeing him, even if he is arrested?"

"Not an atom," said the inspector. "See him as much as you like, and welcome. You'll find him in middling poor trim, though."

"Do you mean he's ill?"

"I don't know. He says he's got a pain in his tummy; but we've had the doctor to him, and he say's there's nothing the matter, bar nerves and a bit of debility. Pretty name for pure funk, I should say. But perhaps you'll find out what it's all about."

"Perhaps," said Wilson. "Any more?"

"That's about the lot, I think. Isn't it enough for you?"

"And yet," said Wilson, returning abruptly to the beginning of the conversation, "you're not satisfied. What is it?"

The inspector fidgeted a second or two with the papers on his table. "Well, you know," he said at last, "I like *proof*. Now this isn't proof, it's suspicion. There's the hell of a lot of it, but it's suspicion when all's said and done. That's the worst of these poisoning cases, nine times out of ten you can't get proof. And anyway . . . he strikes me as a decent young fellow enough, bar this foolery, and I'd be sorry to hang him if I wasn't sure."

"Very improper attitude in a hound of the law," Wilson commented.

"Oh, it's soft of me, I know. And I expect he'll hang all right. But there it is."

"Well, I think I'd better see him before he *is* hanged," was Wilson's comment as he left the room.

Chapter XVI

SET FOR ACT TWO

Wilson did not, however, go straight to Martin Delahaye on leaving the inspector. There was still a considerable amount of information of which he desired to possess himself before interviewing the young man, and he had noted down Dr. Midhurst, the Coburn Rise boarding establishment, and Delahaye's own office, as ports of call. He wanted to see whether Dr. Midhurst, as Harold Cayley's medical attendant, at least to within a few days of his death, could throw any light upon the state of his mind or upon the story which he had just heard; but Dr. Midhurst turned out not to be at home, and Wilson accordingly proceeded in the direction of the Guest House, intending to ask a few questions about the bottle whose contents were so mysterious. As he came down Coburn Rise, he noticed that the door of the Guest House was ajar, and that standing in front of it was a large limousine, whose chauffeur wore a broad grin and one ear cocked in the direction of the open door. Before he had had time to do more than wonder what was going on, the door was flung wide, and there appeared on the threshold a majestic figure with what looked like a kind of turban on its head, and an immense fur wrap draping its limbs. Majesty, however, was apparently ruffled; at least, Majesty's face had a dis-

tinct purplish tinge, and Majesty's voice, as it turned to hurl a final thunderbolt through the doorway, a shrill note of wrath which went ill with a natural rolling contralto.

"I shall say no more, madam!" said the voice. "Had you brought your complaint to *me* in the proper manner *I* would have seen that it was suitably investigated. As it is, as you have elected to make utterly unfounded statements to the police, I must wash my hands of it. You will have only yourself to blame for any odium which your—establishment may incur with persons of decent instincts!"

A slam of the hall door was the only reply which the Guest House vouchsafed to this rebuke, and the great figure, somewhat discomposed and very out of breath, moved ferociously down the path.

"Who on earth's that?" Wilson, waiting until she had passed, asked of a man who had just come up behind him. "The Lady of the Manor?"

The man gave a joyful guffaw. "Jolly good name," he said. "I'll remember that, if you don't mind my borrowing it off you. As a matter of fact, that's Mrs. Fremantle, the Patroness of the Literary Institute here, and the nearest approach to a feudal dignitary we have in these degenerate days. I think she's been trying to form a kind of manorial court of her own, and that's what the row's about."

"Oh," said Wilson. "To try Mr. Cayley's murderer?"

Instead of answering, the man stood quite still and gazed in Wilson's face. Then he gave a satis-

fied chuckle. "I thought as much," he said. "You are Redford's Mr. Wilson, aren't you? Have you come after the fellow who killed Cayley?" Wilson looked a question. "My name's Thorley; you won't know it. I've not yet made my mark in the world of crime, though it's only a matter of time before I start murdering some of the people in this Suburb. Mrs. Fremantle, for one."

"You live here?" said Wilson.

"In this very house," said Thorley, striking an attitude. "I—even I—handed the biscuits to the berluggy murderer the night before he was taken. Are you working for Delahaye, Mr. Wilson? Anything I can do to help? It's a silly trick, arresting him."

"I am retained by Miss Redford," Wilson answered cautiously, "to look into this business. If you're living here, Mr. Thorley, perhaps you'll introduce me to the Miss Forresters. And can you tell me what this trouble was about?"

"Oh, it's what I said," said Thorley. "Miss Forrester, as I take it you know, has decided that Martin Delahaye is the criminal everyone's looking for. She trots off straight to the police with her views, and they come along and arrest Delahaye pronto. Not a word to anyone else. Well, Mrs. Fremantle is, or thinks she is, the Great Panjandrum of these quarters, and her view is that *she* ought to sift all suggestions and accusations before they're communicated to any outsider. Bit medieval, as you say, but that's how she feels. She started the evening Cayley died, trying to hold a sort of private

enquiry in advance of the police; but they stopped her. And now, you see, a member of *her* community's actually been hauled off to quod without anybody consulting her about it. Hence the racket. I'm told there was quite a pretty little scene when she got the news."

"Was she preparing to arrest anybody herself, do you know?" Wilson asked with amusement.

"I've heard," said Thorley, "that Dr. Midhurst was to be the criminal, having slain poor Cayley in a fit of jealous wrath at being superseded. Why he should, in that event, slay Cayley rather than Shorthouse, the loved one rather than the rival, isn't for me to say. But I also hear that Dr. Midhurst is now exonerated, and the crime was a pure accident. Somebody just left a bucket of strychnine about, you know; and Cayley put his fingers in it and sucked 'em. You can take your choice."

"Thank you. I think Miss Forrester's what I had better take next," Wilson said.

"You're not likely to find her oncoming, after this," Thorley warned him.

She was not. She was so far from oncoming that Wilson had a great deal of trouble to make her grant him an interview at all; and he began to feel that there were occasions on which it would be satisfactory to be still armed with the coercive powers of Scotland Yard. However, Miss Forrester, though angry and uncharitable, was not really a vindictive woman; and, when she had been allowed to let off sufficient steam about the inquisitiveness and bad manners of all investigators, she consented

to allow Wilson to interview herself and her sister in her private room. The interview, however, gave him very little satisfaction. It was perhaps hardly to be expected, particularly after the intervention of the Patroness, that the charges against Martin Delahaye would be abated; but Wilson had hoped to find in them some discrepancy or loophole, and he was disappointed. She repeated, line for line, all that Calcott had told him, with one exception.

"You said," he enquired, "that you saw the word Strychnine on the bottle?"

"You are misinformed," Miss Forrester said. "I said nothing of the kind. I never saw the bottle."

"Then who did?"

"My sister," said Miss Forrester, with an inclination of her head towards that lady, who had found the conversation lacking in interest, and was making vain endeavours to inspect her chin in a mirror hung five feet from the ground.

"Madam," said Wilson severely to Miss Millicent, who clicked her tongue and looked very serious, "will you please tell me what was written on that bottle you found in Mr. Delahaye's drawer?"

"Drink Me!" said Miss Millicent surprisingly. "Millicent!" said her sister, and she jumped and turned scarlet. "Oh dear no, how silly I am to forget! That's the wrong bottle, of course. You said Mr. Delahaye's bottle, didn't you? It said *Poison*." She rounded her eyes to O's, and looked mysterious.

"Did it or did it not also say Strychnine?"

"Oh, yes," said Miss Millicent. "Of course it did."

"Why of course?"

"Why, because it had strychnine in it. Don't you remember, Jane, you told me it had?"

"Never mind what your sister told you, just now," said Wilson, while the elder Miss Forrester glared. "Tell me what you saw yourself. Did you see a bottle?"

"Yes," said Miss Millicent, nodding her head several times. "A *little* bottle."

"Where was it?"

"In Mr. Delahaye's top drawer, just at the corner. I'll show you in a minute if you'll just come upstairs."

"Can you tell me what sort of bottle it was?"

"Oh," said Miss Millicent, "a *little* bottle. Just the sort you keep Cascara in." She smiled cheerfully. "And it had a little piece knocked out of it, just like the bottle the policeman showed me."

"And had it a label?"

"Oh, yes, it had a label."

"And what did the label say?"

"Poison! Oh, yes, and Strychnine, of course. To say what was in it, you know. Like Cascara, only it wasn't Cascara."

"You're sure Strychnine was actually written on the label?"

"Why, of course, when Jane told me it was Strychnine, I knew it was. But I don't know how to spell it," added Miss Millicent, as an afterthought.

"Then, as a matter of fact," said Wilson patiently, "you did *not* know it was strychnine until your sister told you."

"No, how could I? I never heard of it before. I shouldn't know it if I saw it."

"You *know,*" Miss Forrester interrupted in an exasperated voice, "you told me you'd seen Strychnine on the bottle with your own eyes!"

"Well, of course I did. You said it was. Nobody would put strychnine in a bottle and not label it. Why, anybody might take some, thinking it was Cascara! Nobody would be so careless. Of course," she added reflectively, "Mr. Delahaye's a very careless man. He's always forgetting to put his laundry out. Jane! Perhaps that was it! Perhaps he forgot to label it, and then he didn't remember what he'd put in it, and then Mr. Cayley asked him for a Cascara, and——"

"Be *quiet!*" said Miss Forrester.

"Thank you, madam," said Wilson politely. "It appears to me perfectly clear that this bottle was not labelled Strychnine, whatever it was labelled. If I may make a suggestion, it is that one should be extremely careful about putting words into other people's mouths. It is rather apt to create a bad impression in a court of law. I trust for your sake the other statements which you have made to me rest on rather less slender foundation, or my client will have very little to answer. Good afternoon."

With this Parthian shot he departed, leaving Miss Forrester checked and spluttering with indignation; but he knew quite well that it was nothing but a

paper triumph. He had discredited a witness; but, as he had told Miss Lydia, he was not an advocate, and was not interested in the discrediting of witnesses. All that he had really discovered was that the bottle was not labelled strychnine, and what was the use of that? "Why can't the young fool say where he got it from?" he reflected irritably as he made his way to the offices of the Bureau of Left-Wing Information.

There, however, he fared much worse. Negative, and worse than negative, was the information which the Bureau, very reluctantly, gave him. He had arrived there soon after five o'clock, when their three or four newspaper-strewn rooms were humming with a bustle as of imminent departure; but he thought, from a casual first survey, that there was more than normal anxiety in the faces at any rate of little Bernard Robinson and his head typist. They had been in conclave together when he appeared; and it was a very worried expression that the little mouse-coloured secretary turned on him.

Bernard Robsinson obviously regarded the police as the natural enemies of all decent-minded persons, and was bitterly regretting his last night's outburst to Rachel. At first he declined to say anything whatever; but Wilson was used to handling witnesses who suffered from mistaken loyalty, and he quickly had the little man talking.

"It's no use, you know, Mr. Robinson," he said. "What harm you can do Delahaye you've already done, and you'll only make matters worse if you try and go back on it now, if he's innocent."

"I don't care twopence," Robinson said crossly, "if he's innocent or if he's guilty. It's no business of mine to go raking up tales about him."

"But half a tale," Wilson pointed out, "is worse than none, particularly if you're so anxious to hide it up. You only rouse suspicion. Come, Mr. Robinson, are you going to tell me now or the police tomorrow? They'll be round here directly, you know; they aren't so foolish as not to take up a line of investigation that's staring them in the face. Isn't it better to tell me, now, what you know, rather than have it dragged out of you in court?"

Robinson was still not at all happy; but at length he agreed to tell. And what he had to tell made it perfectly plain that Martin Delahaye, during the past two or three months, had been suffering from some influence which had violently disorganised his life. It was very rare, Robinson admitted, for him nowadays to spend a whole day at the office; sometimes, though infrequently, he would not come in at all; and quite often he would put in a perfunctory appearance in the morning, go out to lunch, and not return for the rest of the day. In actual hours, Robinson calculated under pressure, he had been working less than half-time for the period named.

This, however, was not all. The actual missing of hours was the least trouble. What had worried Delahaye's office more was that he, once the keenest worker in it, appeared to have lost all interest. When he was there, he would only attend to business by fits and starts. He would promise a memorandum and not deliver it; he would make appointments

with important people and forget to turn up; he would let stuff which ought to have gone to the printer lie on his table for days without looking at it. In general, Wilson gathered, he was far more trouble than he was worth.

"And you put all this down to his engagement?" he asked at last.

"Well, I didn't know what else could be the matter," Robinson said. "Of course, it was odd, if it was that, that it shouldn't have come on sooner. They got engaged in March, and till the summer everything in the garden was lovely. I didn't know how it might be taking him. He's a queer fellow, Martin is, always up and down. Even now, he's most frightfully good, sometimes, all of a sudden, when he gives his mind to it. But most of the time it seems as though he just hadn't got a mind to give. Of course, his inside's dicky, poor chap."

"Yes," Wilson said. "How long has that been going on?"

"Oh, I don't know. About the same time, I think. Of course, you know, Martin always does go sick when there's anything wrong—he's made like that."

"Ye-es," Wilson reflected. Missing half his time at his office, on which he had once been so keen, distracted and useless when he was there, lying about his movements to his fiancée, and seeing Mrs. Cayley home on two or three occasions at least—it did look like a pretty considerable infatuation. But that was probably all he would get here. "Well, thank you very much, Mr. Robinson," he was beginning

in a valedictory tone, when suddenly he caught an unguarded expression of deep relief on the assistant secretary's face. So there was more to it, was there?

"Mr. Robinson," he said, with an abrupt change to his sternest manner, "what are you keeping back from me?"

"Nothing," said Robinson, shutting his mouth; and Wilson saw that he would have to dig for his information. He was looking round, considering possible openings, when his eye caught the cash book that was lying open by Robinson's hand; and he almost jumped in his chair. Of course! Robinson and the typist brooding together over the cash book; a woman taken out night after night and even to Brighton for the weekend. . . .

"What is Mr. Delahaye's salary?" he asked sharply; and saw by the other's wincing movement that he was getting warm.

"Four-fifty a year," muttered Robinson unhappily.

"And how does he find money to take young women to Brighton? Where does he borrow it from? Come, Mr. Robinson, can't you see that you'd better tell me?"

"I *can't* tell you!" Robinson said in despair. "I don't *know.*"

"But you know something. What is it?"

It was not very much, commercially considered; but Wilson was well aware what a staggering thing it was for the secretary of a body like that in whose office he was now standing to steal its funds even

in the smallest amounts. Robinson called in the typist with whom he had been talking on Wilson's entry, and she explained that it was the petty cash account that was in default. Turning over a small pile of I. O. U's.—Wilson noted with amusement that the staff of the Bureau appeared to finance itself chiefly by short-term borrowings from the petty cash box—she explained that she already had an I. O. U. for six pounds from Delahaye, which she was quite unable to get him to settle, that a few days ago he had asked her for more, which she had been unable to supply, as the box was empty, and that she had that morning found a petty cash counterfoil made out for a cheque she had never cashed at all. The cheque-signatories, she explained, were Delahaye himself and the chairman of the Bureau, of whom the latter lived in the country, and was in the habit of signing a dozen or so blank cheques in advance, so that Delahaye would only have to add his own signature, and the office's stamp.

"There's nothing to show he did, of course," said Robinson unhappily. Now that his secret had been wrested from him, he appeared to find it a relief to unbosom himself thoroughly. "But it's damned queer."

"Yes," Wilson said reflectively. "Has Mr. Delahaye borrowed money from you?" Robinson nodded. "How much?"

"Oh, a few quid. I never have any cash," said the assistant secretary, picking his own I. O. U. out of the pile and displaying it. "What I lent Martin wouldn't keep him in fags."

"I see. Well," said Wilson, "thank you very much. I don't think I need bother you any more."

"But, I say," Robinson pressed. "Is Martin . . . will they . . . damn it, how *is* Martin?"

"I don't know," said Wilson. "I'm just going to see him now. But don't worry yourself, Mr. Robinson. *You* haven't hurt him."

Chapter XVII

DUOLOGUE IN A CELL

"Now for it!" Wilson gathered himself together to approach his client, and as he proceeded towards Medstead Police Station, he made notes of what appeared to be the present case against Martin Delahaye. It looked pretty strong. First, there was the poison, nature unknown and source undisclosed, which had admittedly been in his possession on the day of the murder, and had vanished by the next evening. He said he had thrown it away, but apparently he must have lied—though for what purpose Wilson could not imagine—about the time at which this was done. And, in any event, there was nothing to show that the poison itself had been thrown away. All that had been found was the bottle.

Then—he had been violently in love with Leah Cayley, a love which had driven him to neglect his work, and to steal from his own office (at least, this seemed the most likely reason for the financial affair). He had neglected his fiancée, and spent every available moment in Mrs. Cayley's company, and the fact that he had kept the secret and lied about it certainly indicated that one, if not both, of the pair was suffering from a sense of guilt. Wilson said to himself that he would have to see Mrs. Cayley, and endeavour to extract from her a little

more information than she had vouchsafed to Inspector Calcott; but for the moment, he felt, the other party came first.

Well, there was motive enough and to spare, whatever the lady's attitude. Of course, young men in Martin's position and with his upbringing did not necessarily take to poison to remove their rivals; but in his case the passion seemed to have been unusually strong. It was the secrecy, and the taking of the money, which stuck in Wilson's throat; and he could imagine the boon which they would be to a Crown counsel. Possession of the instrument of death was also fairly clearly indicated, if what was in that little bottle was strychnine, and Delahaye's refusal to say where he got it from at least suggested that it was. However, it might be that the man who made it up was not an accomplice, and would come forward and clear up that point.

Motive, then, was proved; possession of the instrument probably proveable. There remained opportunity. But here there was no help for Martin. It was certainly clear that he was not actually in the room when Cayley died, or for some time before; but that proved nothing, for the poison could easily have been given to the unfortunate man some time before, as Shorthouse's pick-me-up had been given. "How, in that event, would he have induced him to take it?" Wilson wondered. "Or did Cayley habitually swallow anything that was handed to him?" But, he recollected, even if Martin was not in the room, he might very likely have been in the building. He certainly was there at a late hour, if

what Tony Redford said was true; and there seemed to be no direct evidence that he had ever gone away. The maid at the Guest House was certain he had not returned there early, though she could not say at what hour he had come back. Probably, Wilson thought, very late indeed, after everyone had left the Institute, and after—yes, of course this must be it—after he had thrown away the incriminating bottle in Medstead Ponds. But why did he stay? and deny that he had stayed? If he stayed, he must have been hidden somewhere, but what on earth for? He could not have been awaiting a chance to murder Cayley, for if that were so, he never got it. Cayley had not left the hall between the opening of Sir Arthur Dawlish's speech and his own fall, more than an hour later; and the doctors were certain that the poison would have begun to take effect almost immediately on being swallowed. Whether Delahaye were guilty or innocent, the reason why he had stayed in, or come back to the Institute, and why he had denied it, seemed equally obscure.

But it was the defence, supposing there *was* a defence, and not the Crown, which need be bothered by these niceties. Wilson, like Calcott, realised that the case was so far compounded of suspicion, not facts; but he also realised that the suspicion was very strong, and that, so far, his own enquiries had only resulted in increasing it. Martin's stealing of the money, and his false statement that he had left the Institute early on the night of Cayley's death, were two facts not yet known to the police; but no one could have pretended that they improved his

prospects. If Wilson had not known how easily the blackest clouds of circumstantial evidence can gather around the head of an innocent person, he would have put down his client as guilty; as it was, he suspended judgment, merely thinking to himself that the young man, if he did not want to see himself uncomfortably near the gallows, had better stop his singularly futile lying, and tell all there was to be told. For all Wilson knew, he was still saying that there had been nothing between him and Leah Cayley.

He was not, however. The dejected creature whom Wilson found huddled in his station cell had at least given up the concealment of his *affaires du coeur* as a bad job.

"It's good of you, Mr. Wilson," he said when Wilson had introduced himself, "to come here to see such a hopeless idiot."

"About Mrs. Cayley, do you mean?" Martin nodded and bit his lip. "I must say," said Wilson, "your description doesn't seem to me far from the mark. What on earth could have possessed you to deny it?"

"Ray—Miss Redford," said Martin, hanging his head. "I hadn't told her . . . I didn't think anybody knew. I hoped they wouldn't ever need to know."

"*Never?*" said Wilson incredulously. "How long did you think you were going to be able to keep on playing one girl off against another?"

"I didn't mean to . . . I didn't want to . . . I thought it would stop."

"*It* would stop? What would?

"My . . . Mrs. Cayley."

Wilson stared at him with a growing contempt. "Are you trying to tell me," he said, "that Mrs. Cayley was—leading you on?" His training did not lead him to be sympathetic to young men who tried to shelter themselves behind women.

"No," Martin said. "I didn't need any leading on. I . . . I went crazy. You don't need any leading on when you're crazy. I—oh, my God, I didn't know anything could be like that! It was like being two people—Jekyll and Hyde sort of thing—and one of them was mad. How could I tell Miss Redford? I didn't want her ever to know about the mad one; I kept hoping he'd die—but he didn't."

"Kept hoping *who* would die?" Wilson asked.

"Why, me. The crazy half of me, I mean. Why?" He looked up and caught Wilson's expression. "Good Lord, did you think I meant Cayley? I didn't want *him* to die—how could I? I might have killed him I suppose, if . . . if he'd made a row when she was with me. I don't think so, but I might. Look here, you don't understand in the least. I don't suppose you want to; it's a poor sort of thing to be mixed up in."

"It's my business to understand," Wilson said stolidly. "Go on."

"Well, damn it, then, can't you *see* that I didn't want him to die. Why, if he had—I'd have had to marry her. At least, I thought so."

"And didn't you want to?"

"No!" Martin almost shouted. "I wanted to marry Rachel. I do want to marry Rachel. But I couldn't marry her, then—how could I? She's so honest. I didn't want her to know."

"Suppose," said Wilson, who was beginning to get a line on the young man, "suppose you tell me all about it as it happened."

After this conversation, the story, when he got it, did not surprise him as much as it seemed to surprise the narrator. It was clear that Martin Delahaye, his senses, probably, a little starved by a somewhat under-emotionalised engagement, had been completely thrown off his balance by Leah Cayley's beauty. He had met her, he explained, for the first time three months ago, when he had gone to live at the Guest House, which he had done deliberately—such is the irony of fate—in order to see more of Rachel. Once met, however, he had been unable to get her out of his mind, and he had thought of nothing but how to contrive ways of seeing her again. At first, it appeared, he had hardly considered the possibility of her reciprocating; he had only wanted to be in her company and to look at her face. But, after the first meeting or two she had shown signs of being willing to continue, and ever since then, more and more of his energies had been devoted to securing more and more meetings. The visit to Brighton together was a single experiment, which either he or she—Wilson could not quite make out which—had decided must not be repeated; but in lunching and dining and dancing, or simply in sitting and looking at each other, more and more time

had been spent every week, till any girl less simple-minded than Rachel Redford would have long ago suspected. "I tried to be very careful that she shouldn't," Martin said. "We went to different places, and I didn't meet Mrs. Cayley in the Suburb—only I saw her home two or three times, just near the end."

"When you were duly observed," Wilson said caustically. Martin made a desperate movement of his hand.

"I know I was a lunatic," he said. "I knew it all the time. But—you don't know, Mr. Wilson—I felt I should have died, really, physically died, if I hadn't. Just to look at her, just to—to feel her near; it was like drink, I *couldn't* keep away."

"Just to talk to her, in fact."

"Talk!" said Martin. "We never talked, to speak of. We hadn't anything to talk about."

"And this arrangement satisfied you?"

"Do I look as if it did?" said Martin miserably. "Why, I'm trying to tell you—I couldn't bear it. I *knew* it was all wrong, and I'd go mad altogether if something didn't happen." As he described his affair, it was clear that it had been one of those passions purely of the senses which have been known to seize on better men than Martin Delahaye; that its violence had utterly dismayed and astonished him; that he had known he was going the best way to destroy any chances of permanent health and happiness he had, and had longed for weeks to end it, but had been literally unable to do so. The more he argued with himself, the more he told himself

that he was a sensible young man in the twentieth century, to whom such Victorian experiences did not occur, the more fiercely his passion ate him up.

"And was this," said Wilson, cutting short the tirade when he felt it had gone on long enough, "was this the reason you were going to commit suicide?"

"Half," said Martin. Wilson looked an enquiry. "I'd thought about it," he explained, "sometimes, when I felt I'd never—come sane again, and I was making a mucker of everything. But I didn't really mean it till . . . till . . ."

"Till what?"

"Till she got bored," Martin said. He had avoided throughout, as far as possible, mentioning the name of his enchantress. "And till she started going about with somebody else."

"You expected her to be faithful, then—to you?"

"No," Martin said. "Not faithful. Not anything. But to like it—going about with me, a little. Not to do it as an accident—as if it might have been the postman, or—or the lawn-mower. I thought she'd know the difference, anyway," he said bitterly. "But she didn't. I don't suppose she ever had, really."

"And then?"

"Why, then, I saw I'd made a mucker of myself for nothing, absolutely nothing whatever. Not even a penny stamp. And if I'd had the guts of a louse,"—his eyes went dark with a recollection of those days—"I'd have—wiped her out of my mind, and thought no more about it. But I couldn't—I

couldn't stop. And every time I saw her, it was hell, absolute hell. I can't tell you——" he stopped.

"Was it then," Wilson asked abruptly, "that you took the petty cash?"

"No, before. Oh, my God," said Martin, suddenly realizing, "do you know that too? Did they tell you at the office?"

"No. I guessed."

Martin looked far more ashamed of himself than during his long recital. "Well," he said after a pause, "I can't say anything. There's nothing *to* say—except that I think you know the worst. D'you feel inclined to take on anything like me now?" Wilson looked steadily at him. "I'll swear I didn't kill Cayley, if that's any good," Martin said. "But that's about the only thing I didn't do."

"There's some more information," said Wilson slowly, "that I want from you, first, Mr. Delahaye. You said you were going to commit suicide. With the poison you had in your drawer?" Martin nodded. "What was it?"

"I don't know."

"But you told Miss Forrester it wasn't strychnine. Why?"

"I didn't say it wasn't. I said it couldn't have been. Not . . . to commit suicide with. It *couldn't.*" He shuddered, and covered his eyes with his hand.

"Why not?"

"Nobody," Martin said with an effort, "*could* commit suicide—like that."

"Oh!" said Wilson with sudden enlightenment. "Cayley, of course! I had forgotten you were still there. In the room?"

"No. I heard . . . things."

"Didn't you ever leave the Institute at all?"

"Not till afterwards. I couldn't. I couldn't really go away." The reason was plain enough.

"Why did you say you'd gone?"

"Because—I'd told Miss Redford I was going. I didn't want her to know I'd stayed. I didn't think it mattered, anyway."

"And then—did you throw the poison away?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I'd changed my mind . . . I funked it," said Martin, very low. "After that night . . . I didn't know before. I thought one just went out. But I knew I couldn't face—*that*."

"But you told me you believed it wasn't strychnine."

"But I didn't know what it *was*. I didn't know what it might do to me. I couldn't face it. It was just cowardice, I know; but it's true. I just threw it away, at once."

"But you'd got it for suicide," Wilson said, reflecting that this was either extremely good acting or the real thing. The horror in Martin's eyes might certainly have been produced by a student realisation of the physical possibilities of suicide.

"When did you get it?"

"On Friday of last week."

"Where did you get it from?"

" I can't tell you."

" Do you mean you don't remember? "

" No. I mean I can't tell you."

" My dear Mr. Delahaye, this is a serious question."

" I'm sorry; I haven't got an answer."

" Do you mean," Wilson asked, " that you have promised not to give the name? " Martin nodded. " But, surely, the promise was made before you—got into this position? Doesn't that alter the case? " This time the head was shaken firmly. " But, Mr. Delahaye, I am really in earnest about this. Won't you tell me? I will engage not to pass it on to anyone else."

Martin looked him up and down for a few seconds, and then shook his head again. " If you don't want a thing to be known, don't tell it," he said, " however safe people say they are. I promised I wouldn't. Sorry."

Wilson was annoyed at this unexpected mulishness, and showed it. " You haven't displayed so much sense in your actions," he said, " that you can afford to keep back important information."

" If I can't afford it," Martin said, responding to the tone instantly, " I'm sorry. But I can't tell you, and that's that."

" There are other ways of finding out, if you won't say," Wilson threatened. But his client appeared quite unmoved, and for the moment he contented himself with recapitulating the points of the story he had just heard. He ended with a final adjuration to Martin to tell everything that he knew, and

then rose to go.

"Mr. Wilson," said the prisoner, as he finished, "I'm not going to ask you what you think of me—I can guess. And I know that if you take me on, it won't be for me, but—somebody else. I only want to say, if you've got to tell—if you feel you must tell Miss Redford—what I've been telling you, will you—that is, if you can bring yourself to do it, tell her—tell her ——"

"Yes?" said Wilson, as he stopped.

"Nothing." Martin had abruptly turned his back. "Only give her my love. If she'll have it."

"Certainly, I'll tell her," Wilson promised, and went to the door. With his hand on it he had a final thought. "I suppose," he said, "you didn't yourself see anything at the Institute that night, did you, which would help us to discover who did kill Mr. Cayley?"

An innocent question, he thought; but it's effect was surprising. The prisoner swung suddenly round, and his face was white. "No!" he said almost angrily. "No! I didn't see anything! Anything at all!"

"Well, what on earth's the meaning of that?" said Wilson to himself as he left the cell.

Chapter XVIII

INGENUES CALL

"Umph!" said Wilson, opening his eyes and sitting up. On the other side of the fire Mrs. Wilson made two socks into a neat ball.

"It's half-past eleven, dear," she said. "Hadn't you better go to bed?"

"Yes. The only thing," said Wilson, staring at her as if he were really half-dreaming, "is to find the criminal." He got up and began automatically to shut the sitting-room window.

"Yes, dear. But that's what you generally want to do, isn't it?" his wife remarked.

Wilson laughed, and recovered himself. "You shouldn't let me talk to you in my sleep," he said. "I mean that, about this young man, I can't prove anything, and I can't even decide whether I think him innocent or guilty, until I've found out how it really happened."

"And if *you* can't make it out," said Mrs. Wilson acutely, "I'm sure a jury won't be able to, either, and that will be so unpleasant for the poor young man. Didn't you think he was speaking the truth, Harry?"

"I *know* he wasn't," Wilson said. "At one point, at all events. And at another he refused to tell me something that he must have known quite well. But that doesn't prove that all his story was

lies, or even that the central part was. So you see my difficulty, Mary. I *must* find out the real truth."

"It's very annoying of him not to tell you," said Mrs. Wilson. "But I suppose if he doesn't want you to know, he has some reason of his own."

"Yes. But why doesn't he want me to?"

"Perhaps he's trying to shield somebody."

"Perhaps. But who? No, I've tried that way, and it leads nowhere, except to the wife. And *she* leads nowhere, at present. I don't know enough about him to make a list of people whom he might be shielding; and, anyway, that doesn't say why he should hide where he got his poison from. I shall have to start again at the beginning, and find out who could have murdered Cayley, and how that poison got into him, and that's the devil of a job. It means going over the whole place with a tooth-comb. I wish finding out the truth about a crime was half as easy as the newspapers think it is!" said Wilson, rather fiercely.

"Well, you can't start to-night, dear. Not if you're going to go over places with tooth-combs," his wife said, removing a large black lump of coal from the fire. "You'd really better go to bed."

To bed her obedient husband went, and to sleep, having learned by long experience that the solution of a problem was much more likely to occur to a sleeper than to one who lay awake and perplexed his brains. On this occasion, it is true, no particular light had presented itself by the morning; but he got up fresher, if not wiser, and strengthened in his

determination to start re-investigating his case right from the beginning. As he went to his office, he reviewed in his mind the very slender store of facts from which he must make a start.

Cayley had taken about fifteen grains of strychnine, of which a quarter of a grain was accounted for by Shorthouse's mistake. His fatal attack must have come on almost as soon as the stuff had entered his system. This involved a murderer who (a) was present at the Institute on that evening, (b) had, at some time, some conversation with Cayley, in the course of which he handed him his dose, and (c) either had easy access to strychnine, or had recently purchased a large quantity. Fifteen grains was a pretty big allowance. (Or had he—or she—given Cayley the strychnine long before, and simply waited for him to take it and die? Wilson thought not; he thought such a course demanded too strong a nerve for most criminals. And, besides, Cayley might suddenly take it into his head to have his prescription analysed.)

This left a pretty fair field of suspects, considering the size of the gathering at the Institute, and the fact that the guilty party would hardly have advertised his conversation with his victim. It might be necessary to interview all the people who admitted to having seen or spoken to Cayley, in the hope that one of them might have heard or seen something which would throw light; but Wilson could not say that he liked the prospect. The question of motive might, of course, narrow it a little. On the face of it, Mr. Cayley's wife supplied the

only known motive for murdering Mr. Cayley; but who, of all potential lovers, so ardently desired the lady's affections as to run the risk of murder? Martin Delahaye, possibly; at least it would be argued so. But was there anyone else? Or could the lady herself have been the slayer? She did not care much for her husband while he was alive; she showed little grief at his death; and she stood to gain her freedom and his insurance money. Husbands had been killed for lesser reasons, Wilson knew; but he could not decide whether it was sufficient motive in Leah Cayley's case until he had seen her. This he would have to do, anyway, in order to get her side of Delahaye's story.

At this point in his meditations, he found that he had reached his office door. As he entered, Jevons, his clerk, informed him that a Miss Redford had been waiting some time to see him. Wilson was surprised, and a little annoyed to find his client so impatient for news; but when the Miss Redford entered she turned out to be Rachel, whom he had not met before. And what Rachel wanted was simply news of Martin Delahaye.

"Yes. I saw him last night," Wilson said in answer to her enquiries. "He asked me to give you his love, if you'd care to have it."

"*Care!*" said Rachel indignantly. "Martin's very stupid if he thinks that I——" She broke off. It was evident that Martin's affections were still not a subject which she cared to discuss, though she had thought things over again and again during the past twenty-four hours. With a tiny jerk of the should-

ers she pulled herself back to what she really wanted to know.

" Mr. Wilson," she said, " my aunt's been talking to me, and I thought—from what she said—I thought you thought Martin was guilty." She brought the word out clearly and firmly, as if to show that she was not afraid of it. " Do you? "

" If I did," said Wilson, avoiding the direct question, " I should tell Miss Redford so. Can't you trust me? "

" But you think he might be? "

" The Crown does, Miss Redford," said Wilson, " or they wouldn't have arrested him."

" I'm not asking you what the Crown thinks," said Rachel. " I'm asking you what you think. You've seen Martin, now; do *you* think he did it? "

" Why do you ask? "

" Because I want to know! Because," said Rachel, summoning all her courage, " if you *do,* I think—I don't want to be rude, Mr. Wilson—but I think we ought to get someone who doesn't."

" You want an advocate, really," Wilson said gently. He was too sorry for her, and admired her loyalty too much, to feel annoyed.

" No, I don't! I want a sensible person. Somebody who knows something about people, and what they could do and what they couldn't. You probably think," said Rachel, flushing a little, " that I don't know anything about Martin because I didn't know about this—about Mrs. Cayley. But I think . . . I *know.* I could have known if I'd asked—if I'd wanted to find out. I *did* know that

something was wrong, though I didn't know and I didn't try to think what it was. You see, Mr. Wilson, I thought Martin would tell me—when he wanted to. And sometimes I thought he was going to; only then at the same time I could see he didn't want to, and I didn't want him to unless he did. I'm being horribly muddled, but I do wish you'd try and see what I mean. It's just because of this—because he's naturally so very bad at hiding things, that he was so worried about all this, and not being able to tell anybody, because it was Mrs. Cayley's secret as well as his, I suppose. But if he'd really killed Mr. Cayley, he'd have told you, and everybody else. Besides," Rachel, seeing from Wilson's face that she was not making headway, persisted, "he *couldn't* have. Not plotted to kill somebody I mean. I mean, poisoning means thinking it out somehow, doesn't it? Getting the poison, and then getting Mr. Cayley to take it, somehow—you couldn't do that, could you, without thinking it out in advance? And Martin *couldn't.* I know you'll say that people do things they wouldn't otherwise, in . . . in this sort of state—but not things that they *couldn't* do. *Don't* you see?"

"I see," said Wilson, quite unconvinced, but trying not to show it, "that Mr. Delahaye has a very loyal friend."

"Mr. Wilson!" Rachel had started shy, but indignation now loosened her tongue. "I didn't think you'd talk like a man in a bad play! Loyalty's got nothing at all to do with it! If you really want to know"—she flushed a little—"I don't even know

whether I *am* loyal—and it can wait, anyway. It isn't loyalty, it's just being absolutely sure that something *could not* possibly happen. *Now* do you see?"

"I do see," said Wilson, "and I beg your pardon for being clumsy. I take your point, and I can add that your conviction is—evidence, like anything else."

"But you don't believe it? You don't believe Martin?"

"I don't know him well, yet," Wilson said. "I don't know you, either. I will say this, that what he told me last night is quite *believable,* if you understand me. There is no reason why it should not be true. But——"

"But what? Why but?"

"Because," said Wilson, "one can't and mustn't believe too instantly, when one is dealing with feelings and acts—no matter whose—which have led up to murder. You don't know any murderers, Miss Redford; they haven't come into your experience of life yet. But let me tell you that many murderers are just like you and Mr. Delahaye. The human heart is a strange thing, and functions in ways one does not expect. You say that Mr. Delahaye could not have committed this crime? Wouldn't you also have said that he couldn't have fallen in love with Mrs. Cayley?"

"Yes," said Rachel honestly. "But," she added, "that was because I didn't know—I mean, because I wasn't thinking about that sort of thing. If someone had told me, and *made* me think, or if I'd let

myself wonder—as I told you I didn't—I should have had to know that it wasn't . . . impossible. But this *is* impossible. Don't you see the difference?"

"Yes, I see," Wilson said. "It's quite a clear point. But still, Miss Redford, I can only say that I'm doing my best. It wouldn't be fair to any of you to say any more. Is that too little for you?"

Rachel looked at him steadily for a minute, and then gave a half sigh, "I don't think you're very cheering," she said. "But I think you're straight. I think I trust you."

"Good!" said Wilson. "I wish you could persuade Mr. Delahaye to trust me, too."

"Why? Won't he?"

"He won't give me some information which is very important to his case," Wilson said; and went on to explain about the bottle of poison. "In these matters, Miss Redford, it's extremely unwise for people to keep things back, even if they think they're of no importance. I've tried to explain this to Mr. Delahaye, but he doesn't seem to see it. Do you think you could persuade him otherwise?"

"I don't know," Rachel looked a little worried. "Martin's very obstinate, sometimes, if he doesn't want to do anything. Besides . . . did you mean I was to go and see him?"

"I think that would be best," Wilson said. "It would be easy enough to arrange for you to go to him, if you wanted to. It's not the prison, you know, not at present."

"It isn't that!" said Rachel. "It's—would *he*

want me to? You see . . . it's rather difficult, isn't it?"

"My own impression," said Wilson in a non-committal voice, "was that he was intending to ask me to send you there, last night—but wasn't sure what you would say."

"The donkey!" the girl half-whispered, her face clearing perceptibly. "How *could* anybody be so stupid! I'll go just as soon as I can, Mr. Wilson, and I'll try and find out what you want. And now I won't bother you any longer. Good-bye, and thank you." Wilson allowed himself a small sign of relief when she was gone, and told Jevons to get Inspector Calcott on the phone.

"Hullo!" he said. "Have you got that bottle by you? Yes, the one you fished out of the pond. I'd like to have a look at it, if I may. No, you needn't bother. I'll come round in about half an hour."

Chapter XIX

PROPERTIES—A BOTTLE AND A DIARY

The bottle, label and all, was lying on Calcott's desk when Wilson entered. He picked it up and turned it over thoughtfully. It did not seem to offer great hopes, considered as the sole clue. It was just an ordinary small bottle, of the kind in which one buys twenty-five aspirin tablets, with half a label still adhering to it. The POI to which the inspector had referred was printed, but there had been some ink writing below, part of which was still legible, even in its sodden condition.

"Make anything of it?" Calcott asked sardonically. "The chip's the only distinctive thing that I can see. It's fairly new, but I don't see us combing London for a man who had a bottle with a chip in it."

"Is the bottle a regular line?"

"Yes."

"Traced it?"

"Yes, to Digges and Farewell. They turn out about six thousand a week, I'm told." Calcott chuckled.

"Selling to the trade?"

"Mostly. And to doctors, of course."

"Well, if they keep a list of customers I suppose you could ask them what doctors they supply with these things in the Suburb."

"Have done," said Calcott. "Not that it's likely to be much help, for it's ten to one the fellow didn't get it in the Suburb. He wouldn't want it to be too well known what he was up to, and he has plenty of shady friends in town, I should imagine, who'd be only too willing to oblige. Or it may have been his own bottle, and he may just have chucked out the quinine or whatever was in it."

"I hardly think he'd have bothered to relabel it, in that case," said Wilson. He had taken out a pocket-lens and was poring over the little bit of paper. "You know, that, for what it's worth, is a point in his favour—at least, a point against premeditated crime. I mean his having kept it in an open drawer, labelled POISON. Somebody really bent on killing would hardly be so careless. Hullo! This is interesting."

"What is?"

"It's a disguised hand."

"What, on the label?

"Yes. At least, I'm pretty sure it is. There isn't much written here, but you can see the fellow sloping it backwards and then forgetting and starting a new word forwards. Disguised hands nearly always go backwards; it's a silly trick, really, for it's so simple to see through. I should say that this one is almost certainly disguised." He passed bottle and glass over to Calcott.

"Magnificent," the latter said ironically. "And now, Sherlock, will you please tell me *whose* handwriting is so carefully disguised?"

"Carefully, but not expertly," Wilson supple-

mented. "He ought to have known better, but it's surprising how ostrich-like humans are about their hand-writing. But I quite agree it doesn't get us anywhere; it merely suggests that the gentleman didn't want to be traced, which makes the transaction a little fishy. I'll have to check that it isn't Delahaye's writing, of course."

"It isn't," said Calcott, "at least, I'm no expert, but it isn't in the least like. I'll show you a specimen of his before you go."

"Have you got," Wilson asked, "that list the sergeant made out, of the people to whom Cayley spoke during the evening?"

"Yes. It's here." Calcott dived in a drawer. "About as long as your arm. Are you going to interview 'em all over again?"

"It looks as if I'd got to," Wilson sighed. "Whoever did murder Cayley, must have given him the stuff, or got him to take it, somehow, probably in the course of the evening, and one of these may chance to have heard something that would throw light on it."

"Whenever he was given it," Calcott said, "he can only have taken it just before his death, poor fellow. Remember the strength of the dose."

"Yes. No. That depends," said Wilson, "on how he took it. If it was loose, in a powder, yes; but it's not very likely to have been loose, because of the taste. It was probably in a capsule, and if the capsule was very tough, it might have been a long time before the stuff got into his system."

"Which all makes it such a lot easier for us,"

Calcott grumbled. "We shall find ourselves calling in Mrs. Fremantle, after all, before we're much older."

"That's the Institute lady, isn't it? Does she want to be called in?"

"She's decided she doesn't." Calcott laughed, and threw a long typewritten document over to his companion. "Read that."

Wilson read, with growing amusement. It appeared that Mrs. Fremantle "had been moved to write her letter by the contemplation of the complete inefficiency and blind tactlessness of the police, who appeared no nearer, after nearly a week, to solving the mystery of Mr. Cayley's death than at the beginning. She, Mrs. Fremantle, had offered her services immediately after the melancholy event to conduct a *private* enquiry, by which means the *truth* of the matter might have been ascertained rapidly and effectively, without the *very unpleasant* publicity which the officiousness of the police had brought into the affair.

"But, as it was, suspicion and a general atmosphere of *distrust* had been created, as well as a *most unhealthy* tendency to indulge in private searches for the criminal, and to call in *professional busybodies*" —"That's you," said Calcott—and, "having regard to all these facts, Mrs. Fremantle had regretfully come to the conslusion that the enquiries which the police were making were *worse than useless,* and that no good end would be served by the public *continuing to co-operate* with them. She was considering whether to take steps to bring the conduct

of the police to the notice of the Home Secretary."

"Dear, dear, dear!" said Wilson, having finished reading the document. "What's it all mean?"

"For us," said Calcott, "it means that she's instructed her own servants not to give any information to the police, and not to admit them to the house. As they haven't any to give, and as they're much too frightened of us to obey, that's no great matter. But she's quite capable of kicking up a dust in Parliament, and nobody'll be pleased about that. These people have too many friends altogether. Matter of fact, I had a chit from the Home Office this morning, asking how we are getting on. Quite polite, of course, but you can see they're a bit nervy. You'd better hurry up and find us some more criminals."

"I'll do my best," Wilson said. "Though I must say you don't give me a great deal of help. You might let me have a look at that list of doctors when you get it. By the way, I suppose you don't happen to know who young Delahaye's doctor is?"

"Dr. Midhurst," said Calcott. "Not that that helps you much, for I don't suppose he provided him with poison. Much too respectable an old creature. I haven't asked him, though; perhaps I ought to."

"I'll do it for you, if you like," Wilson said. "I'm going to call on him, anyway, to see if I can extract anything helpful about Cayley's friends or his habits. But I want to see the widow first. After all, she's the person most likely to be able to give information."

"Better take an oyster-opener with you, then," Calcott advised.

* * * * * * * *

Leah Cayley might be an oyster, Wilson reflected; but she was a very madonna-like oyster. As she sat, with slightly bent head, listening while he explained the reason of his visit, her lovely still face suggested irresistibly some of the canvases in the National Gallery. "And equally stupid inside?" he wondered, "if you discount what is purely shape and color." He was not quite sure; and he watched the deep grey eyes closely while he enquired about the truth of Martin Delahaye's account.

Mrs. Cayley appeared to find his questions not very interesting and faintly impertinent; and he had to explain twice that Martin Delahaye was standing in peril of his life, before he could extract any information. But when he did get it, it was a confirmation, as far as it went, of the young man's story.

"Yes, he was in love with me quite a lot," Leah said. Her choice of phrases, Wilson felt, was not as careful as the tones of her voice.

"And he took you out?"

"Yes, to dinner and dances, and a joy ride sometimes. There wasn't anything *wrong* about it ever," said Leah, with a faint flicker of animation.

"Did he want to marry you, do you think?"

"Oh, I expect he would have, if I'd been free."

"Did he ever ask you?"

"Oh, no, he didn't do that. He just told me he didn't think much of Mr. Cayley, sometimes."

" Forgive my asking, Mrs. Cayley," Wilson said, " but did you ever, to your knowledge, give him any idea that you might have married him if you had been free? "

" Oh, no! "

" You didn't—return his affection? "

Mrs. Cayley gazed at him a second or two, apparently in deep thought. Wilson was wondering whether the question had put her in a corner, when he suddenly observed a slight but unmistakable movement of the long white throat. She was yawning! and the profound pause merely meant that she had forgotten his question. He put it again.

" Oh," she said, " Mr. Delahaye's only got four-fifty a year. It would have been silly, wouldn't it? "

" And Mr. Cayley had? "

" Six-fifty," said Mr. Cayley's widow with decision. " And rising regularly."

Wilson suppressed a gasp with difficulty. No wonder that Delahaye did not talk much with his lady-love, if this was a specimen of her conversation. Yet, even at that moment, she shifted slightly, so that her head was framed against the light, and Wilson felt a pure physical throb at the sheer beauty of its line. It was very odd. He turned back to the subject of Harold Cayley, and asked whether he had had any quarrels or enemies.

" None that I know of," said Leah, who had obviously been asked that question before.

" Who knew him best, should you say, apart from yourself? "

" I didn't know much about his affairs," said

Leah. "He didn't tell me very much about anything important. I suppose Dr. Midhurst knew him best."

"But they had just had a quarrel, I understand?"

"Oh, no," said Leah. "Mr. Cayley just changed his mind. He was always changing his mind about medicine, and it was the same with food. It didn't mean he'd quarrelled."

"I suppose," said Wilson, "Mr. Cayley didn't keep a diary?"

"Oh, yes. But it's gone."

"Gone! How do you mean?"

"Well, it wasn't with his things when they brought them back."

"You mean he had it on him the night he died?"

"He must have had. He always carried it about with him. And it isn't anywhere about the house."

"If it was small enough to carry on him," Wilson reflected, "it can't have had much in it."

"I don't know. He thought it was very important. He kept it in shorthand, and made a great fuss about it. There's plenty of old ones here, if you want them. But the one he was keeping's gone."

"I see. Well, thank you very much, Mrs. Cayley. May I use your telephone before I go?"

"Certainly. It's over here. You don't mind if I go, do you?" said Leah Cayley, disappearing with a rapidity which Wilson thought surprising, until he heard the purr of an expensive car coming up to the house. He looked out of the window before telephoning. From the car descended a young man

in very lovely grey flannels, who came down the path to the door. He was not, however, immediately admitted; and after a second or two Wilson heard a shrill and angry voice, presumably rating a domestic, in the upper regions. "And you go down and open the door at once, and don't let me have to tell you again, you lazy little devil!" said the voice in conclusion; and Wilson, after a moment's startled reflection, recognized it as belonging to the mistress of the house, though very different in tone from when he had heard it last. "I wonder," he thought as he turned back to the telephone, "how often young Delahaye has heard that particular note—or the fellow in the car."

Of the telephone he wanted two things—Dr. Midhurst, and the missing diary, supposing the police had got it. Dr. Midhurst, he learned, would be home after lunch and could be seen then; but on the diary he got no light. The police had not got it, and they were very sure that it had not been on Cayley's body when he died. This, Wilson thought, deserved a little more reflection. If Mrs. Cayley was telling the truth, it looked very much as though the diary had been abstracted from the dead man; presumably by his murderer. At any rate, it was curious that a piece of property by which Harold Cayley set so much store, and which might have thrown considerable light on his personal relationships, should have vanished directly after his death.

Chapter XX

SECOND INTERLUDE

"Are you going to be back to lunch, Rachel?" Miss Lydia asked her great-niece. On returning from Wilson's office, Rachel had only stayed just to look in on her aunt, and tell her her plans, before setting off at full speed for Medstead Police Station to fulfill his commission.

"No, I don't think so. At least, I'm going to wait till they let me see Martin, if I have to wait all day," said Rachel. "And then I ought really to look in at the office. I can't imagine what a state things must have got into. I'll get a bit of lunch somewhere, I expect. Why?"

"Dr. Shorthouse is coming to lunch," said Miss Lydia. "I met Harvey Crouch yesterday, and talked to him about radium, and he seems interested. So I thought I'd get the young man up and talk to him."

"Oh, then, I won't come in. You won't want me there," said Rachel, with complete innocence. "You know he's supposed to be going to marry Marion Baddeley, don't you?"

"Who? Dr. Shorthouse? But you told me he was married already!"

"Yes; but he can get *un*married, can't he? Anyway, that's what Marion's telling people, Tony says."

"She's that woman you said was his secretary, isn't she?"

"Dispenser," Rachel corrected. "Yes. I don't like her much, but I think it's because she doesn't like me, probably. I daresay she's all right. Well, good-bye, auntie. I want to get there as soon as I can."

Left alone, Miss Lydia sat by the fire, communing with herself, for about half an hour before her guest appeared. She was indulging herself, she knew; but as Rachel's affairs now seemed to be safely in Wilson's keeping, she felt that she could afford a little self-indulgence, and a chance meeting on the previous day of two acquaintances, the one possessing money and the other both influence and an interest in medical research, had seemed too good an opportunity to be missed, particularly as the shadow of the law was now lifted from her protégé. So she had arranged with both of them to meet the young man, and had then hastily telephoned for him to come and be coached in his part. On the whole, she reflected, it was quite tactful of Rachel to be otherwise engaged.

Shorthouse duly arrived, and was hungrily grateful for all that was being done for him, and not unappreciative of his lunch. He was a pleasant enough companion, intelligent and reasonably well-read, though a critical eye might have suggested that the reading had been picked up from others rather than acquired by himself. But though he exerted himself to talk, there was a flatness and anxiety

behind his manner, upon which Miss Lydia at length commented.

"You're either very bored, or not well," said she. "Which is it?"

"The latter, I think," said Shorthouse "—if either. I've got a bit of a headache." He pushed his hand through his hair with a slightly exaggerated gesture, and gave a short laugh. "It's a pretty permanent condition with me, nowadays."

"Are you overworking?" Miss Lydia demanded.

"Only wish I had the chance! Three patients have politely told me they've no need of my services, since that affair at the inquest. And they won't be the last. I'll soon have all the leisure I can do with," the young man said bitterly.

"Money?" Miss Lydia enquired. She always believed in asking directly what you wanted to know.

"Nothing more than usual." Shorthouse shrugged his shoulders. "The vultures haven't noticed the carrion, yet. I don't suppose it'll be long before they do, but so far they haven't."

"If it isn't money and it isn't overwork," Miss Lydia reflected, "there's only one thing it can be. Dr. Shorthouse," she asked abruptly remembering Rachel's gossip, "are you thinking of leaving your wife?"

"Good God, no!" The answer was obviously sincere. "How could I? Suppose I wanted to—I've no money, and my wife hasn't either. And I've got children. Some people seem to think human beings live on air," he grumbled.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Oh, I didn't mean you," Shorthouse said.

"Then I may take it that you did mean somebody. Look here, young man," said Miss Lydia. "I'm quite aware that I'm being an offensive and impertinent old woman——"

"Not in the least," Shorthouse smiled up at her.

"Don't interrupt . . . *But,* if you're going to meet these people of mine and to get anything by it, I must warn you that entanglements aren't going to pay at the present time. I don't say they're saints, themselves, or anything of that sort; but their view is that a man must keep his affairs out of the public eye. Which is to say, that he mustn't have any until he's earning enough to have them quietly. It may be a snobbish view, but that's neither here nor there. What I'm warning you is that neither of them will touch you with a poker if you come trailing a lot of unexplained women at your heels. Do you see?"

"Oh, I *see* all right," said Shorthouse, looking gloomily at the floor.

"Well, then, pull yourself together. You can't have both. Make up your mind which you want, and don't be a little boy."

"I don't *want* both!" Shorthouse cried desperately. "But I can't . . . Oh, God, what a hole!"

"As bad as that?" Miss Lydia looked at him with sympathy in her eyes. "What have you been up to?" He shook his head. "It isn't a child, is it?"

"Oh, no. Nothing so simple," said Shorthouse

with dreary cynicism. "I'm a doctor, you know."

"Then what's the matter?"

"I can't tell you, I'm afraid." He looked almost ready to cry with unhappiness.

"Then would you rather not come to-morrow?" Miss Lydia asked, turning the knife.

"If you say not . . . No, let me come, please! You know I can't afford to miss chances. I'll try and get around this thing somehow. Miss Redford," he said earnestly, "I'm not really an ungrateful brute, only a wretchedly worried creature. If you'll let me come to-morrow, I'll try my level best to set my affairs in order, and if I don't succeed—well, I can just fade away, and you won't be any the worse. Please, may I come?"

"Right, come along," said Miss Lydia.

"And, may I say . . . whatever happens, I shall never forget how good you have been and how much you have done for me. Please believe that I can be grateful, even if unsatisfactory." He pressed her hand for a second or two before he rose to go. "Don't be too angry with me for being a fool. I can stand anything but that."

"Go along with you," Miss Lydia said. "I'll make no promises until after to-morrow."

When he had gone she sat very still for some minutes, staring perplexedly into the fire. "That's a dangerous young man," she thought, "if he can rouse in an old woman like me such an impulse to pet him and give him the gain he wants. I wonder . . . he's got some pretty good stuff in his head, if I'm any judge, but I wonder whether he's

got the strength of mind to get himself out of this tangle, whatever it is. Harold and Vivian won't raise a finger to help him unless he does—they aren't the stuff that's moved by eyelashes. . . . I wonder what it is, and who the woman is who's got her claws into him. He's too good—at least, too good-looking, to be eaten up by a girl in a Garden Suburb. Heavens! Lydia Redford," she suddenly addressed herself aloud, "aren't you ashamed of yourself, to be maundering this gait over a young charlatan not half your age?" She relapsed into silence again, and consulted the fire, her expression gradually hardening into one of distinct animosity. "I'd like to get her here, whoever she is, and talk to her for five minutes!" was her final and vindictive conclusion; and she was still satisfactorily composing caustic remarks to be made to Dr. Shorthouse's encumbrance when, somewhat to her annoyance, her great-niece returned from the police-station.

Miss Lydia, with her mind on one young man, did not want to be forced to consider another, particularly one whom she did not really like, and her enquiry after Martin Delahaye's health was certainly grumpy. But Rachel was too excited to notice details. She was, in fact, in the seventh heaven, though a heaven of mingled delight and indignation. In her first account of her visit, delight predominated. It seemed that all clouds between her and Martin had been cleared away. Martin had confessed every detail of his infatuation—at least, as many as she would consent to hear. He had de-

clared that he was now cured of it, that since Leah Cayley had so patiently thrown him over he never wanted to hear her name again; and (with many desperate apologies) that he was Rachel's, to do what she would with—if she cared to exercise any property in such damaged goods. The greater part of their interview, it appeared, had been expended in this type of conversation, in a joint wiping-out of the past and a rejoicing in the fact that it was so definitely past. Only when Miss Lydia's listening powers were tried almost to the point of refusing to hear a word more about what Martin said to Rachel or Rachel said to Martin, did Rachel consent to change the subject; and then her face began to blaze with indignation.

"Auntie," she said, "they're *keeping* him there! They're going to arrest him!"

"Well," said Miss Lydia, "what did you expect?"

Nothing of the sort, it seemed; in fact, it seemed that Rachel, now that her own doubts of Martin were set at rest, had all but forgotten there was any other evidence against him. She had so completely accepted his story, now that she had heard it from his own lips, that it had now become for her part of the facts of the case, just as much as Cayley's death, and her morning's conversation with Wilson might never have taken place. What obsessed her now was not Martin's danger, to which she seemed all but oblivious, but the stupidity of the forces of the law in keeping him locked up at Medstead when they might be hunting the trail of the real criminal.

"Did you find out what you were asked to find out?" Miss Lydia at last broke into the tirade.

"Where Martin got that bottle from, you mean. No, I didn't. I asked him, but he wouldn't tell me."

"Wouldn't tell you! Is the man crazy?"

"Couldn't, I mean," Rachel amended. "He promised not to, you see. And he says he's been enough of a pig already, without doing things he doesn't have to do."

"Oh, does he? I wonder if he'll still think the same in the dock," said Miss Lydia, irritated by such sublime confidence and her own secret thoughts into being more brutal than she had intended. Rachel turned a little white, but parried the blow.

"Martin won't break promises just because you try and frighten him," she said staunchly. "And I wouldn't ask him to. But, Aunt Lydia!—" her courage, largely the product of the joy of reunion, began to crack beneath her—"You don't really think that —that Martin's in *danger,* do you?"

And Miss Lydia, having dealt her blow, had to spend the next hour or so in trying to extract its sting.

Chapter XXI

SCENE WITH AN ORACLE

" Dr. Midhurst? " Wilson asked of the neat maid who opened the doctor's door. But the words were scarcely out of his mouth when a door opened, and the doctor himself appeared, beaming a bland welcome. In another minute, Wilson felt sure, he would be rubbing his hands and saying, " Well, well! and *how* are we to-day? " Cayley, he thought, had ample excuse for changing his doctor, if he had really done so. But in this matter Wilson knew himself to be prejudiced, a hater of bedside mannerisms; and he followed Dr. Midhurst through his well-furnished hall into his no less well-furnished study, restraining his desire to smack its owner in the face, and merely reflecting that here was a doctor who in contrast to Shorthouse seemed to be in no monetary difficulties.

" Sit down, sit down, Mr. Wilson." With a large hand, Dr. Midhurst motioned him to an enormous leather chair, and set a box of cigars at his side. " What can I do for you? I hardly suppose you've come to consult me professionally, eh? "

" Not as a patient, exactly," Wilson said with a smile. " I see you've guessed my business."

" Guessed, my dear sir! No guessing needed. Everyone who has the slightest concern for the safety of society knows what a debt it owes to the great

Mr. Wilson."

"Much more, I assure you, to the organisation in which I learnt my trade," said Wilson, who was still as jealous of the honour of Scotland Yard as when he had been its most junior member. "But it wasn't about the safety of society at large that I came to see you, Dr. Midhurst, at this moment. I am at present retained by Miss Redford to look into this poisoning case as far as it concerns that unfortunate young man, Mr. Delahaye."

"That very foolish young man," Dr. Midhurst amended severely. Wilson looked a question. "I have known young Delahaye for some considerable time, Mr. Wilson; and I cannot help saying—though I should not like to do him any harm with the police—that his conduct during the past few months has been—well, foolish is not the word for it."

"What conduct exactly do you mean?" Wilson asked. He was well satisfied with the doctor's opening, as it suggested that he would now get an easy opportunity of checking up Martin Delahaye's story. But Dr. Midhurst was not quite so innocent as he appeared at first sight. He cleared his throat in a highly professional manner, put on a pair of spectacles and scrutinised the detective very carefully through them.

"Before answering that rather general question, sir," he said, "I should like to know a little more definitely what you are trying to find out. You will pardon my being quite frank with you, but I have always had personally a profound distrust for *some*—

I will only say *some,* of the methods of the police." Like Mrs. Fremantle, Wilson reflected with amusement. They did not personally resemble each other, yet there was something in Dr. Midhurst's large pompous manner which certainly recalled the Patroness. "I should like to feel assured that anything I may say, as it were, *in camera* will not be indiscriminately passed on to those in authority. Otherwise I might—I do not say I should, but I might feel constrained to phrase my remarks differently."

"I am trying to find out the truth, doctor," Wilson replied to the question rather than the speech. "That, I may say, is my clear understanding both with Miss Redford and with Mr. Delahaye's fiancée. I hope that what you have in mind to tell me may help me to do so. I may say," he added, "if it will help you at all, that Mr. Delahaye has already admitted a violent attachment to Mrs. Cayley, and that this fact had also been independently ascertained by the police."

"Ah!" said Dr. Midhurst deeply. "That certainly puts a different complexion on matters. You will excuse my caution, Mr. Wilson, even if it seems to you a trifle excessive. In my profession, one learns instinctively to keep one's own counsel—sometimes, I fear, on occasions when it might have been better to have spoken."

"Quite so. You were going to say?" Wilson prompted, wondering if this interview were going to take the rest of the afternoon. Dr. Midhurst could not be called a rapid witness. Even now, he

took off his spectacles and polished them twice before he replied.

"I was going to say," he said finally, "exactly what you have just told me you already knew, that this foolish young man had a ridiculous and undignified passion for Mrs. Cayley, which he took no steps to control."

"Undignified?"

"I call it undignified," said Dr. Midhurst, "for a man who has reached what are commonly known as years of discretion to pursue in season and out a lady who plainly has no desire for his attentions."

"No desire? I gather she went about with him a good deal," Wilson said.

"My dear sir, one must be rational. One must move with the times. The word 'attentions' does not bear the meaning it did when you and I were young. The fact that Mrs. Cayley more than once dined and danced with this young man does not imply, in these days, that she had any particular regard for him; in fact, I have the best of reasons for knowing that she had not. One may regret these changes of manners. I do myself; I confess to lingering regrets for that unfashionable trait, modesty. But it would be idle to deny the facts."

"You say you have 'the best of reasons for knowing' that Mrs. Cayley did not return his affection?" Wilson enquired.

"I know Mrs. Cayley—and had known Cayley—for a long time," Dr. Midhurst said, with a smile which on any face less broad and smooth would have been a simper. "I have had ample opportunity for

studying both their characters, and I can assure you, with the weight of all my experience, that Mrs. Cayley never gave a thought to young Delahaye that was anything but the barest friendship. I said as much to Cayley when he consulted me about it."

"Oh, he did consult you?" Wilson said. "Did he dislike the—friendship, then?"

"He was inclined to be a trifle unreasonable about it, at one time. Poor Cayley, you know," said Dr. Midhurst with a sigh, "was not by any means always the wisest of men. Though he had married a young and beautiful girl, he had very little conception of how to manage her, and, though I do not wish to speak ill of my dead friend, I am bound to say that he often nagged like a peevish woman. However, on this occasion I convinced him that there was nothing whatever to get excited about, and I am happy to say he agreed to take it reasonably."

"But Mr. Delahaye," Wilson said, "he didn't take it reasonably, did he? Would you agree that he was totally overbalanced, Dr. Midhurst?"

"Overbalanced," the doctor said, giving him a shrewd look, "as far as behaving like a rational being is concerned. But as far as taking human life is concerned, if that is what you are asking, certainly not!"

"Oh, you think that, do you?"

"Absolutely out of the question, my dear sir. A psychological impossibility. In my profession, you know, an experienced man has made as much study of the mind as he has of the body, and from my experience I assure you that it is absolutely impos-

sible that Martin Delahaye should have done this thing."

"You are very positive, doctor." Wilson was finding these short lecturettes a trifle irritating. "Yet Mr. Delahaye had poison in his possession."

"Had he indeed? The naughty fellow!" Dr. Midhurst looked as if he were about to wag a monitory finger. "Yet, after all, Mr. Wilson, what is that? Poison has many purposes other than that of taking life. He may have desired to put a dog out of its pain—or to clean a straw hat. The non-medical mind, if you will excuse my mentioning it, is far too exclusively occupied with the lethal uses of poisons. They have many others—even in daily life."

"He says," said Wilson shortly, "that he was intending to commit suicide." Dr. Midhurst sighed.

"Oh, dear! How extreme these young people are! He should not have done that. But I am afraid, Mr. Wilson, that your information leaves my opinion unaltered. Regrettable as it may be, I cannot say that I should really have been surprised, knowing his mental state, to learn that Martin Delahaye had committed suicide. But, though I recognise that you, in your legal capacity, may regard suicide as self-murder, I cannot myself admit, speaking as an ordinary human being, that it is on anything like the same plane as deliberate homicide."

"Perhaps not," Wilson said. "Yet the fact remains that this young man, whom you assure me is innocent, was in possession of poison, and refuses to say where he obtained it."

"Does he indeed? That is foolish of him; but not, if I may say so, culpably foolish. I should myself rather regard it as mistaken chivalry." Dr. Midhurst beamed.

"Dr. Midhurst," said Wilson, "you are this young man's doctor, I understand, and know a good deal about him. Can you suggest any source from which he may have obtained this poison? You must see that, until the point is cleared up, it must tell very seriously against him."

The doctor looked hard at him. "I don't quite understand you," he said after a pause. "Are you suggesting that *I* may have provided him with the means of suicide?"

"I am not suggesting anything," Wilson replied. "I am only asking if you can make any suggestions to me."

"I am glad to have your explanation," Dr. Midhurst, who had sat up rather stiffly in his chair, relaxed again, "because such a suggestion would have been insulting, more insulting than you are perhaps aware. But as regards your question, I am afraid I have no suggestions to offer. As you may possibly gather from my attitude, the provision of poison for would-be suicides is not an activity which any medical man would be anxious to advertise; and, unless you can persuade young Delahaye to tell you, I am afraid you will have a long search before you find the source of that poison."

"Can you tell me of any other medical man who attended Mr. Delahaye?"

"Now you are asking *me* to provide *you* with

suspicions, Mr. Wilson," Dr. Midhurst replied with a chuckle. " I am afraid I cannot undertake to do that. In any case, I am not aware of the existence of any other medical attendant. You may be aware that it is not usual to play medical men off against one another as though they were butchers! "

" Yet Mr. Cayley appears to have done so," said Wilson with meaning. Dr. Midhurst looked at him reproachfully as if he had committed an indelicacy.

" I would very much prefer not to discuss that," he said. " I am still, between ourselves, not at all satisfied, in spite of what has been said, that Cayley ever had any serious intention of making a change. Young Shorthouse is a bit of a chain-jumper, you know; and, while I don't wish to accuse him of lying, I feel that he may easily have read more into a chance remark of Cayley's than was warranted. Of course, it all matters very little now, and, as I was in any case contemplating retiring from general practice very shortly, there was no pecuniary loss that I cared about. But it is unpleasant, to say the least of it, to feel that one's friend may have had an unexplained grievance, and that he went to his death without giving me a chance to explain. That's why I don't much care to have it talked about."

" Mrs. Cayley," said Wilson, " seemed to think that he had definitely decided to make a change."

" On such a matter," said Dr. Midhurst, " which concerns my personal feelings so much, I would very much rather preserve my confidence in my dead friend than take the word of anyone else, however charming. If poor Cayley *did* make a change,

secretly, he had plentiful cause to regret it."

"How do you mean?"

"He selected a remarkably careless substitute," said Dr. Midhurst, with so much meaning in his tone that Wilson looked up sharply.

"What do you mean?"

"A man," said Dr. Midhurst, "who can *admit* to putting ten times the natural dose of strychnine into a pill must be an abnormally careless man."

"Admit?"

"Well, we can only deal with what he admits, can we?"

There was a pause—a pause which gradually became fuller and fuller of meaning.

"I see," said Wilson, having thought it over. "You are suggesting that Dr. Shorthouse actually put a great deal more of his drug, by accident, into the pill which he gave Cayley?"

"It seems to me a reasonable possibility."

"But," said Wilson, "you are forgetting, surely, that the glass in which Cayley drank his pill contained only one-quarter of a grain, and that that amount exactly tallied with the quantity which Dr. Shorthouse admitted to having put in by mistake?"

"Tallied!" said Dr. Midhurst scornfully. "Of course it tallied!"

"Why of course!"

"Mr. Wilson," said Dr. Midhurst, rising to a full height of six feet and a breadth of two-and-a-half or thereabouts, and emphasising his words by shaking a stethoscope which lay on the table by him, "Mr. Wilson, it appears to me that men of your

profession, like others, take for granted standards of efficiency in their professional colleagues with which they would certainly not credit outsiders. It does not seem to have occurred to any one of you to ask *why* Shorthouse's mistake, the mistake to which he confessed, tallied so exactly with the amount of strychnine which you found in the glass. I suggest to you that the confession came, in point of time, *after* the discovery of the drug, and may very well have been dictated by it!"

"You mean that Shorthouse *knew* how much the police had found, before he made his statement?"

"Exactly. Let me put it to you this way, if I may. Here is a man who, on his own confession, was drunk—reprehensibly drunk—when he made up his prescription. Later, he sees Cayley die of strychnine poisoning, and he knows that he may be responsible. He daren't say anything at the time, because he has no idea what, in his drunken condition, he may have done; but when he hears that you have found a quarter of a grain in Cayley's lemonade, he knows what to confess to. So he confesses; but *you* only know what he has confessed. You do not know what he actually did. He may have falsified his poison-book for a quarter of a grain, or for forty grains, for all you know; and the dose which killed Cayley may have been quite separate from that of which you found the traces in his lemonade. Cayley would have taken it, you know. I must admit this against my friend, that he had the most uncontrollable passion for swallowing odd remedies of anybody I ever met."

"You would have to prove," Wilson said slowly, as he considered this new idea, "that Dr. Shorthouse *could* have known how much poison the police had found in the lemonade, before he made his statement."

"The burden of proof is not on me, fortunately," Dr. Midhurst reminded him. "As to that, however, it is easy enough. Whose discretion failed I do not know; but I know for a fact that Miss Longman, that rather disagreeable woman whom Mrs. Fremantle keeps as a secretary, was proclaiming to all and sundry that a quarter of a grain had been found, at least a day before the inquest was held!"

"I see." This fact, if it were a fact, was entirely new to Wilson, and he retained it for future consideration. "Then this is the explanation which you put forward of Cayley's death?"

"It is the only one which seems to me to fit the facts," Mr. Midhurst said. "It is quite inconceivable that Cayley should have been murdered, whether by Delahaye or by anyone else. I had known him intimately for a number of years, and I can personally assure you that he had not an enemy in the world. And suicide is equally impossible. Accident is the only reasonable explanation and when you have all the materials for accident so plainly before you, I confess that it astonishes me that neither you nor the regular police appear to have given it a thought. It does not add to one's confidence in the way the country is administered; and I must say that, as a medical man, I am particularly indignant when one of my colleagues appears

to be spared the necessity of answering for a very serious blunder." Wilson tried to interrupt, but a large hand waved him down. "I quite realize that what I am suggesting with regard to Shorthouse is not murder, probably not even manslaughter, in the eyes of the law; and that for this reason you will not be disposed to regard it seriously. My profession, however, compels me to look on a man who compounds his drugs so carelessly as actually far worse than many a murderer, for he is liable to kill many more people, unless he is checked in his practices; and I demand—yes, demand—that action shall be taken. But for this, Mr. Wilson, I should not have spoken to you in this free and, I quite realize, unprofessional, manner. But there are some occasions on which professional etiquette must defer to public duty!"

"Quite," was all Wilson said by way of reply. He felt that if he had to listen to any more lectures from this pundit he would rise and slay him. "Well, Dr. Midhurst, I think that's all I want for the present. Thank you very much for your information. . . . No, there is one more thing. Do you happen to know whether Cayley kept a diary? And, if so, where it is now?"

"Diary?" Dr. Midhurst looked deflated and slightly annoyed, as though diaries were rather a sordid subject after public duty. "I'm afraid I don't know. He was just the sort of man who would keep a diary; but I don't know whether he did or not. And if he did, I have not the remotest idea where it is likely to be now. Why?"

"You didn't happen to notice whether he had a diary on him the night of his death?"

"No. I am afraid I was concerned with the contents of his stomach, not of his pockets. He may have had, for all I know. Is that all I can do for you? Will you not have a cup of tea or a whisky and soda before you go?"

"No, thank you." Quite apart from Dr. Midhurst's intolerable volubility, this suggestion of his must be looked into quickly, and Shorthouse asked about the diary.

"Then I will wish you good afternoon and Godspeed in your task. And, Mr. Wilson, I would ask you to remember, if you can, that there are living lives concerned in what to you, no doubt, is merely a rather tiresome puzzle. To say nothing of others, Mrs. Cayley is very deeply concerned, and I have reason to know that the prolongation of suspense, and the terrible fear which you keep hanging over her, that her husband may have met his death by someone's malice, is being exceedingly painful to her. She is exceptionally brave, for a woman, and has put on a very gallant face before the world; but you should realize how much strain there is under lying it. It would be an act of chivalry, Mr. Wilson, if you would complete your necessarily unpleasant duties as quickly as possible."

Chapter XXII

FOR WOMEN ONLY

"I don't think that old thing knows quite so much about Mrs. Cayley's psychology as he fancies he does," Wilson said to himself as he reflected upon Dr. Midhurst's information. "I should say myself that she was entirely unmoved by the whole business, except in so far as it interfered with her personal convenience and made her late for appointments with that Pennell fellow. I suppose the doctor's as sentimental as all the rest about the girl's looks. I wonder whether there's anything in what he said about Shorthouse, though. I hope to goodness there isn't."

This reflection, it is regrettable to say, was dictated less by sympathy for Dr. Shorthouse than by dislike of Dr. Midhurst. Wilson was apt to get a little impatient with people who tried to lecture him, and he had found the large doctor's personality peculiarly irritating. He was not, naturally, so moved by his prejudices as to refuse to follow up the suggestions; but he was actually a little relieved to find that it was impossible to follow up Miss Longman till the morning. He came home in an unusually grumpy mood, and found on his table the list, sent round by Calcott, of doctors in the Medstead neighbourhood who had been supplied with small pill-bottles by Messrs. Digges and Farewell.

To his jaded eye the list appeared to be about a mile and a half long and to contain the names of all the doctors resident within a two-mile radius of the Institute. Dr. Shorthouse's name was there; so was Dr. Midhurst's. So was that of the only other doctor in the Garden Suburb of whom he knew. It did not need the caustic note with which Calcott had accompanied his gift to tell Wilson that it was likely to be of singularly little help to him. He pushed it crossly aside, and turned to do some work on another case, which he had allowed to get deplorably behind-hand.

"This Garden Suburb business," he said in a final grunt, "isn't really my job at all."

"Why not, dear?" Mrs. Wilson was not likely to think that any job was beyond her husband's powers.

"It wants an organization of half-a-hundred to cope with it. There's no single clue that anyone can follow up, only lists and lists of names of people who might tell you something, and probably won't. One man can't tackle a proposition like that; only the Yard can do it. And I can't ask Calcott to waste his men's time. But that's the only way that anything will ever be found out."

"Well, never mind," said Mrs. Wilson soothingly. "Perhaps some of them will come and tell you of their own accord."

"Perhaps! And when they do they tell me a parcel of lies, or keep back everything that's of real importance, or preach like a Sunday-school superintendent." Certainly Dr. Midhurst had succeeded

in spoiling Wilson's temper for the day.

This, in all probability, accounted also for the exceeding asperity which he showed in interviewing Miss Longman the next morning. He was not at all attracted by Mrs. Fremantle's waspish secretary, and put her through a cross-examination which would have done credit to a stage American detective. For the rest of her life, after that morning, Miss Longman held a brief for the regular police against all outsiders. Of the result of the examination, however, there was no doubt. Dr. Midhurst was right—confound him! Miss Longman had undoubtedly passed on to a number of persons, some hours before Shorthouse's confession, the information that a quarter of a grain of strychnine, ten times the proper amount, had been found in Harold Cayley's lemonade glass. Nor could the wretched woman even be greatly blamed for this, except for disclosing the contents of a conversation which she had not been meant to hear, and Wilson was bound to admit that five out of every six people would have done the same. It was the carelessness of the Medstead police-station that was really in fault, for discussing confidential matters in the possible hearing of a casual witness; and Wilson was far less inclined to strafe policemen than outsiders. He relieved his feelings a trifle by rubbing it in to Miss Longman that to disclose the results of any eavesdropping with a police-station practically amounted to contempt of court—at which her eyebrows expressed entire scepticism—and then devoted his attention to finding out whether this particular infor-

mation had been, or could have been, conveyed to Shorthouse.

Here again there seemed no doubt. Miss Longman had not herself told him. Wilson gathered, in fact, that she would have cut her tongue out sooner than use it for the purpose of conversing at all with Dr. Shorthouse; but she had told the story more than once in the course of that day, and in company which included more than one of the doctor's friends. And, being pressed for details, she recollected that one of the occasions of narration was at dinner at the Guest House, when a Miss Richardson, who was a great friend of Marion Baddeley, Dr. Shorthouse's dispenser, had been present, and had afterwards asked her a good many questions about how she came to know, and what exactly it was she did know. " And of course *she'd* take anything straight to Miss Baddeley," Miss Longman finished with venom. If she herself had suffered at the hands of this very disagreeable private detective, at least others should not escape. And with satisfaction she gave Wilson Miss Richardson's private address, and watched him hurry off.

Miss Richardson he found at home, and perfectly willing to join up his loose ends for him. A pleasant-faced, amiable girl of no particular character, she saw no harm in admitting and no need of defending the fact that she had immediately communicated Miss Longman's story to Marion Baddeley. " Mary Longman," she said, " is an intolerable cat. I don't usually pass on the things she says about my friends; but this was another matter, mak-

ing charges in a murder case. I thought Miss Baddeley ought to know." Nor could a friend be blamed, Wilson recognized, either for thinking so or for acting upon it; but it began to look as though Dr. Midhurst's suggestions might have something in them, and Calcott have blundered in letting Shorthouse out so easily. Wilson walked up and down for a while opposite Miss Richardson's door, considering what would be the best next step.

It was certainly very suspicious that Shorthouse, having first denied, and denied to the police-officer, that there was anything wrong with his stock of poisons, should, within two or three hours of Miss Longman's information reaching Marion Baddeley, have come forward with a confession of having faked the book to the exact amount of the poison found in the lemonade glass. The confirmation of the five pills buried under the bush, of course, ceased to be a confirmation, once it was admitted that he knew the amount which they ought to have contained; for he would have had plenty of time to make them up and hide them in the Institute grounds before coming to Calcott with his story. It did look as though the poison-book might have been faked to conceal the loss not of one and a half grains, but of a very much greater amount. Though how this greater amount had got into Cayley—if it had—and what, in that case, was the explanation of the comparatively innocuous dose which undoubtedly had been in the lemonade, was still, Wilson reflected, not at all clear.

Whatever the faking of the poison-book, it was

quite clear that the dispenser must have been privy to it; and, if the new theory were correct, it was she who had carried to Shorthouse the news of his peril, and who, in all probability had worked out with him the best way of escaping it. Wilson had not himself seen Shorthouse, but he had obtained word-pictures of him and others concerned in the case from Calcott and Miss Lydia, and had reached the conclusion that the young doctor was certainly the type who needed a woman to hold his hand and get him out of scrapes. If that were the case, then his surgery was the next point of call, and Marion Baddeley the next witness. But interviewing her would not be the same thing as picking up gossip from malicious or amiable persons. If conjectures were correct, she must be an accessory to the concealment of a pretty serious crime, and would therefore hardly be likely to talk for the mere asking. She would have to be bullied or frightened; and, having thought the matter over, Wilson decided that he would take Calcott along with him for the interview. Two might make her talk more easily than one; and, anyway, if Shorthouse was going to turn out to be the villain, it would be Calcott's case and he might as well be in on it. Accordingly, Wilson made his way to the Medstead Police Station, and from there rang up the inspector.

Wilson had been cross all that morning; but his crossness was as nothing to the rage of the Scotland Yard man when he heard the story. It was explicable rage enough; for neither he nor his subordinates appeared in a very efficient light, he for

having swallowed a story with insufficient investigation, and the men at Medstead for having "tittle-tattled like school-girls," as he expressed it. Wilson felt sorry for the two unfortunate fellows, who were obviously going to get a double wigging because their superior's judgment had also been slightly at fault; but he could not deny that a wigging of sorts was deserved. Police-constables, still more police-sergeants, should not chat about their cases with the door open.

Calcott had a little steam of this sort to blow off before he got down to brass tacks. When he did, he agreed that the next thing was to examine Marion Baddeley, and the surgery; and agreed also to be present when this was done. But he was unable to get there for an hour or two, and he urged Wilson not to delay, but to go down at once and see if he could extract something from the young woman. "You see," he said, "it'll be all round the place in a brace of shakes, if I know anything about 'em, that you've been enquiring after this poison business, and if there's any delay it'll give the lot of 'em time to clear clean out, supposing there has been any handy-panky, before we get near them. By God"—the telephone nearly broke under the weight of the inspector's wrath—"when I think I had the fellow safe at the station for hours spinning his yarns, and then like a cuckoo I let him go—and then have to be taught my own business by an outsider—sorry, old man, I forgot."

"It *is* an outsider," Wilson said. That fact still rankled considerably. "If there's anything in this,

the credit's neither yours nor mine. It belongs to that fat doctor who put me on to it. But there's no use crying over spilt brains. I agree with you we'd best have no more delays."

He put down the receiver, and, having gobbled a sandwich, borrowed a car from the station and set out in the direction of Dr. Shorthouse's surgery. Not wishing to give more than the barest warning of his approach, he dismissed the car at the entrance to Welford Avenue, and walked up as quietly as he could. When, however, he reached the house, he saw that there was no need to be particularly quiet, for some, at any rate, of the occupants were engaged in a dispute which would have prevented them paying attention to anything as ordinary as a car in the road. In a first-floor room, it appeared, two women were quarrelling, of whom one had a shrill voice which penetrated well down the garden, and the other a deep voice which let no words escape, but which was charged with no less passion.

—" won't have you here another day! " was what the first voice was saying as he approached. A fierce mutter from the other replied.

" Oh, won't he? " the first voice said. " You didn't hear what he was saying about you last night. You're stupid, that's what's the matter with you. You think that just because I don't say anything, and go on with my business, making a home for him ——" There was an interruption.

" Yes, it's all very well to sneer, when you come here and get your money just for mixing up pills which anybody could do who was trained to it, you

think you can insult me as you please, and try and make a fool of my husband, and nobody'll say a thing to you! But you've gone a little bit too far this time. You aren't in the least indispensable to Billy—he says so. And he promised me last night he'd say it to you too. You can wait till he comes home and let him say it himself, if you'd rather—but *I* don't want to have anything more to do with you!"

"Domestic manners of the South Sea Islanders," murmured Wilson to himself as he knocked at the door, the bell being labelled "Out of Order." "It looks as though this might be a favorable opportunity to catch somebody off their guard. At any rate Shorthouse appears to be out, which is one good thing."

The sound of the knocker seemed to have stopped the altercation, and silence reigned as Wilson stepped into the ill-dusted hall. He asked first for Dr. Shorthouse, as a matter of form; and, on hearing that he was out, for Marion Baddeley. The tweenie stopped at the foot of the stairs, and shouted: "Miss Baddeley! Miss *Baddeley!*" A door opened above. "You're wanted downstairs. Somebody for Dr. Shorthouse."

Marion Baddeley came down the stairs to meet him. Yes, it was undoubtedly she who had been quarrelling. She had not the type of face which colors in anger; but there were lines around her mouth and a hard glare in her eyes which left no doubt that she was still in the grip of some strong emotion, and she walked the stairs unsteadily, as if

her whole body were still quivering with it. Behind her, after a little hesitation, came the other party to the dispute.

Half the troubles of the Shorthouse ménage were written in Mrs. Shorthouse's appearance, thought Wilson, looking at her with sympathy in his eyes. A little woman, who must once have been very pretty, with the fair soft prettiness which poverty fades so soon, she obviously had not the mental equipment to grapple at once with a vagarious husband and an insufficient income. She had let her clothes and her hair fall into patent disrepair—and, Wilson recollected, her voice as well. Her house, it was plain to see, did her no credit, and she knew it; and it was equally plain that she was frightened to death of the handsome black-browed creature who was preceding her down stairs. In a flash, Wilson visualized her existence, struggling vainly with household cares which always swamped her, nagging and irritating her husband at the worst possible moments, hating his casual amours and the women who inspired them and yet not daring to make a protest. But she *had* made a protest. A loud, shrill protest, and one which, moreover, she seemed to intend to carry into effect. What had happened? Only a very strong emotion, or the sense of a very strong position, could have brought that little frightened mouse to the point of shouting and threatening. What had Shorthouse been doing?

"You wanted me?" Marion Baddeley said, facing him. But Mrs. Shorthouse, undaunted, pushed on past her.

" If it's anything to do with Dr. Shorthouse," she said in a voice which she was trying to make as firm as she could, " I think you'd better ask *me* about it. I'm in charge here." There was not even a truce in the battle, it appeared. The lines were merely re-forming.

" It was a question relating to the dispensary that I wanted to put," Wilson said. He was not quite sure of his tactics, whether to insist on the other woman remaining, or not. But Marion Baddeley saved him the trouble.

" Have you come from the police? " and looked back at her late opponent with a gleam of real hatred in her face. " Is it about Mr. Cayley? "

" It is about Mr. Cayley," Wilson said. " I am not from the police, but I am investigating, on behalf of Mr. Delahaye, some rather curious circumstances which occurred in connection with the dispensary here."

" You'll do," said Marion Baddeley. " If you'll come into the surgery I'll show you something that you'll like to see! " She turned to go into the surgery, but Mrs. Shorthouse, looking like a bedraggled sparrow trying to pretend it was a turkey-cock, gallantly barred the way.

" You're not going to let anyone into my husband's surgery without his permission! " she said. " And if this gentleman's got anything to say against Dr. Shorthouse I'm going to be there, and I'm going to hear it! "

" You can hear anything you like as far as I'm concerned," said Marion Baddeley. " And if you

want to stand in the hall so that everyone else can hear it I don't care. It won't take me a minute to fetch what I've got to show." And with a single movement she swept the little woman aside, and disappeared through a door at the back of the hall. Mrs. Shorthouse and Wilson, both a little perplexed, were left looking at each other. Mrs. Shorthouse obviously did not know whether to treat the newcomer as a tiger or not, and in any case, was not equal to tackling two tigers at once; and Wilson was trying to size up the situation. "The girl's going to tell," he thought. "But what? and why?" His reflections were interrupted, however, by the return of Miss Baddeley, bearing a large book of ledger type, which she flung down on the hall-table with the air of a tragedy queen.

"Do you know what this is?" she said. "This is Shorthouse's poison book." She opened it. "Now look here. Look at that side. There are the entries of purchases. Now look at that one—the last but one. Do you think that's as it was written, eh?"

"I presume," said Wilson, with distaste in his tones, "that that is the entry relating to strychnine, which Dr. Shorthouse on his own statement altered."

"No, he didn't," said Marion Baddeley. "*I* altered it—at his request. Because he couldn't fudge a line of pen and ink for himself! I altered it—and do you know how I altered it?" Her voice rose two or three tones with excitement. "To hide that he had sixteen grains less than he ought to have had!"

"*Sixteen grains!*" Wilson drew in his breath a little. This was pretty damaging.

"Sixteen grains. That do for you?" said Marion, closing the book with a savage snap.

"No," said Wilson, recovering himself, "it won't. This isn't a case where you can fling about accusations like that at random, without substantiating them." Mrs. Shorthouse gave him a grateful look. "If that is what you say, you must please tell me exactly what occurred. I presume that you know that you yourself stand, if your statements are true, in a rather doubtful light." Even at this moment, he found time to reflect with amusement that he had come prepared to apply a spur, not a brake. These Suburbanites were unaccountable people. But his brake had no effect at all.

"I'm not interested in that," said Marion Baddeley. "This is what happened, if you want to know. When I came in on Tuesday morning, I found Dr. Shorthouse in a frightful state, wanting to know if I'd been messing about with the strychnine. Of course I knew what that was about—I'd been at the Institute the night before, and I know what a state he was in in the afternoon. He might have poisoned the whole house, and never have known. So I asked what was the matter, and he told me he'd lost sixteen grains of strychnine and couldn't think what had happened to it. He swore he hadn't put it in the stuff he gave Mr. Cayley, and he must have lost it some other way. But he told me the police were asking him questions, anyway, and if it came out he'd be accused of murder, and he wouldn't have

anything to say. So he asked me for God's sake to help him, and I did. I faked the book for him so that it should look all right—he was shaking like a jelly, anyway, and couldn't have made a decent show of it—and when the police inspector came he passed it, all right. But the next night, or thereabouts, Hilda Richardson rang up and told me she'd been talking to one of those cats at the Institute, and the police had found a quarter of a grain in the lemonade. So I went round and told him he'd made another mess of it, somehow, and he'd better go and own up before anything worse happened. I said I'd stick by him, anyway—more fool me; but I'm not going to stick any longer, and be chucked away like an old shoe whenever it suits him to get a move up in the world! That what you wanted to know?" she finished, with a sudden lapse into sullenness.

"It's a lie! Don't you believe her!" Mrs. Shorthouse gallantly asserted, though her little face was grey and drawn. "She's a spiteful girl, trying to revenge herself because my husband was going to get a new dispenser. You can't believe a word she says!"

"I'll put it on oath if you like," Marion Baddeley replied contemptuously; and at that moment the knocker sounded again. Wilson, who was nearest to the door, moved across and opened it, disclosing Calcott and a plain-clothes policeman on the doorstep.

"Anything doing?" Calcott muttered; and Wilson nodded reluctantly. He liked Marion Baddeley no better than Dr. Midhurst as a vehicle for justice.

However, the stories coincided too closely to be ignored. "Better take her statement," he said shortly. "And get her away from the other woman. This is Inspector Calcott," he added aloud. "He will want to hear again what you've just told me, Miss Baddeley. Will you take him into the surgery, and show him that book? No, madam," he laid a very gentle hand on Mrs. Shorthouse's arm, "not just yet. The inspector will hear everything you want to tell him in a minute or two."

Mrs. Shorthouse wavered for a moment; then, as the others disappeared, she gave a sob of terror and clutched at Wilson's arm. "It isn't true! It isn't true! It's a wicked, wicked lie! Oh, what am I to do? and what will Billy say to me? Oh—h—h! Oh—h—h!" Calcott had finished his examination and reappeared, looking very grim, before her hysterical weeping had been pacified.

Chapter XXIII

LEADS TO ACT THREE

"This is where your doctor-friend scores, I fancy," said Calcott later in the day. Wilson, having left the police-officers to their distasteful job, had gone away to think things over on the Heath, from which cogitation he had very discontentedly emerged to get the latest news from Scotland Yard. "He seems to've hit on the truth, or pretty near the truth, while we were groping around in the dark."

"Huh!" grunted Wilson crossly. Calcott looked at him with a half-grin. "Private practice is making you greedy about your reputation, my lad," he said. "You ought to be pleased that we're letting your little boy go."

"Delahaye? Are you?"

"Well, we've arrested Shorthouse; and we think Delahaye might as well get out on a string. He'll be under observation, of course."

"You've arrested Shorthouse. On what charge?"

"Oh, murder."

"Whew-w!"

"Well, what did you suppose? Look here," said Calcott, "the accident idea's a bit too thin, altogether, isn't it? When you first told me over the 'phone, I thought it sounded oddish, and when I came to think it over, I saw it was absolutely impossible. In the first place, I don't believe that any

man, however drunk, would shove in two hundred times as much strychnine as he meant; but let that pass. The thing that absolutely does Shorthouse in, to my mind, is what we thought let him out, that quarter of a grain in the lemonade. For, don't you see, we *know* that the stuff in that lemonade was provided by Shorthouse. Miss Longman saw him hand it over, and she saw Cayley put it in and drink it. If there'd turned out to be fifteen grains in that, he might have had a chance of getting off; but it's proved, now, that his big dose wasn't in there at all, but in something else that he must have given Cayley at some other time during the evening—probably in a tough capsule, as you suggested. And no jury in England's going to believe that he made two mistakes in one evening—and so neatly for himself, too. That won't wash. Personally, I'm coming to think there wasn't any mistake at all, that all his drunkenness was a pretence, and that he deliberately made up the second dose too big, trusting that if he were suspected, he'd get away with it's being a mistake. As he jolly nearly did, owing to my being too kind to my fellow-creatures," said Calcott with feeling.

"So you think he's a murderer? Which motive are you giving him, this time?" asked Wilson, who had been privileged to see Calcott's notes on the case.

"That's a nasty one," Calcott acknowledged. "We haven't settled yet. We want the right one, this time. Of course, if we can't find one we can always have a go at manslaughter. But I'm going

to have the deuce of a try to get it—also to find anybody who saw or heard anything of the administration of another dose to Cayley. Of course, it may not have been given at the meeting at all. Yes, it's all very well for you to laugh, you old devil; you're well out of it now. *You* don't have to go through with it when you've made a mucker. I know it's not a case for a jury, yet; but it's going to be, if I have to sit up every night for a week!"

"Bloodhounds on his trail, and no mistake," Wilson commented. "What did he say, when you took him?"

"'So she's done it, the she-devil!' Just that," Calcott said. "He had a nasty shock, poor fellow. Just come back from a lunch-party somewhere out West, all in his best clothes, and looking as pleased as Punch—until he saw us sitting on the doorstep. Then, as I say, he went and gave it all away in one sentence."

"Not that he'd murdered Cayley, surely," said Wilson.

"No. As to that, he admitted he faked up that confession for me to fit what he'd heard about the lemonade; and that he had really no idea, apart from that, how much he'd given Cayley. The pills under the bush were just a blind, as you said. There were some more, but he got rid of them the night Cayley died, in a panic lest he should be searched, and couldn't find 'em again. He stuck to it, though, that he couldn't have put fifteen grains by mistake in anything and that he hadn't given Cayley anything beyond the dose that went into the lemonade.

As to what had become of the missing stuff, he said he'd no idea; but it vanished that same evening. He raced home, he said, as soon as we let him go that Monday night, looked into his surgery to see what he *had* done, and was absolutely flabbergasted to find sixteen grains gone. In a moment of idiocy, he decided to cover it all up, with the woman's help—and then found he'd covered up too much. I asked him how he expected to be believed, having told us three different stories in less than a week; but he stuck to it, of course, that this was the one. Then I asked him where he supposed the missing stuff had got to, and he could only say he hadn't an idea. And as it departed the same night, and as none of his household or his other patients have been poisoned lately, I think we must take it that Cayley had the lot."

"Did he say anything about the diary?"

"Diary? What diary? Oh, of course. I'm sorry; I forgot to ask him. I will if you like. But I don't see what good that's going to do us. You don't suppose that Cayley wrote in his diary. 'Mem: Get murdered Monday night,' do you?"

"No," said Wilson. "But I think his murderer thought he did—or, at least, that he'd written something that would give us some sort of a clue. Else why bother to take it away? It's quite certain Cayley had it on him that night, you know, and even if there turns out to be nothing in it, I should very much like to get my hands on it."

"Well, I'll try to find it," Calcott promised. "But even without it, I think we've got a pretty

fair lot of evidence—thanks to human spite."

"Ye-es. I must say," said Wilson reflecting, "I agree with Shorthouse about the girl. What possessed her suddenly to round on him like that?"

"Sheer, howling jealousy," said the inspector. "He hasn't said a word about it, I'll do him that justice, barring what I told you, that slipped out in the shock; but it's as plain as the nose on your face. We had her a couple of hours at the station, roaring blue murder and mad with nymphomania, before we got rid of her. She's been in love with the fellow for years, trained for dispensing just in order to get a job near him; and he, I imagine, let her play around the way he always does with women, not looking where he was going. Anyway, after she'd done that little job of forgery for him, she seems to have thought she'd got him properly taped, at least I imagine so, and began to presume on it. I gather she's been hinting about the place that he was going to marry her, and one of the things she said to us in her ravings was that if he'd done the square thing by her she'd never have said a word. But there, it seems, she slipped up. He decided it wasn't good enough; and when his wife complained of the young woman's airs, he promised to send her packing. Whereupon she spilt the beans. It's a nasty, sordid story, I'm afraid, and no credit to anyone concerned; though I must say, I don't think the young woman realized in the least that it was a murder charge she was letting him in for. That's one reason we've got to be quick and find something more; I wouldn't be a bit surprised, when she *does* take it in, if she

went slap round and perjured herself something 'orrid. And that would be awkward for the Crown," said the inspector.

"I don't think Dr. Midhurst realized, either," Wilson said. "*He* was talking about accidents too."

"He did not. *He's* been round, too, this afternoon, explaining that it's all a frightful mistake, and that young Shorthouse couldn't kill a fly if he tried. I don't know how *he* knew what had happened; but I believe Mrs. Shorthouse, who's by way of being rather pally with him, rang up and told him. Anyway, he came along, as large as life; and lectured us for half an hour on how to conduct a case, together with some medical demonstration on how it was impossible for the crime to have been committed that way. *I* didn't make head or tail of it, but our man here says it was all bunkum. But really," Calcott said, "what with him and Mrs. Fremantle, it seems to me the Suburb's got more than its share of long-tongued busybodies!"

Wilson chuckled a little. The sufferings of Calcott at Dr. Midhurst's hands went more than a little way to relieve his own chagrin.

"Well," he said, "I wish you joy of it. I must go and find out what my employer wants me to do."

No detective can expect a uniform record of successes in his cases; but few detectives can ever have been so chagrined or so little in conceit with themselves as Wilson was as he made his way from Scotland Yard to Queen Anne's Gate. For anything he had achieved in this case, he bitterly reflected, he

might as well not have been there at all. He had done little more than follow the Scotland Yard officers round and pick up the information which they had already gathered, a day or so later. He had not cleared Martin Delahaye; he had not found an alternative suspect; and the new information, as the result of which the young man had been released, had been discovered by none of his doing, but through the observation of a large, pompous doctor who had lectured him, Wilson, on his own business. And not without reason—that was where the shoe pinched. Wilson, no less than the police, ought to have been alive to that hole in Shorthouse's story; he ought to have enquired, and found out, whether he could possibly have known the result of the analyst's report before he produced his second story; and there was no excuse for him. The least he could do to silence his own conscience was to refuse to take a fee for the amount of his own time that he had wasted; but that would be a poor satisfaction. In this mood, prepared, if necessary, to eat any amount of humble-pie, he arrived at Miss Lydia's flat.

Here, however, he found, not a resentful, but a very perturbed employer, holding a kind of indignation meeting with her great-niece. Martin was not there; the news of his impending release had been telephoned to Miss Lydia, and it was assumed that he would be arriving shortly. But, in the meantime, she and her niece were quite bewildered by the sudden turn of events, and they eagerly turned to Wilson for a possible explanation.

"What does it mean, Mr. Wilson?" Rachel asked. "Does it mean that—you've proved Martin innocent?"

"No, I'm afraid it doesn't," Wilson said, inwardly making a wry face. "I haven't proved anything. It only means that the police now think it more likely that someone else is guilty."

"You mean Dr. Shorthouse?" Wilson nodded. "But *why?* How can he be?" Wilson hesitated a moment.

"I should like you to tell me, if you can," said Miss Lydia, who had gone rather white, "exactly what the evidence against him now is."

Using a certain amount of discretion, Wilson gave them a brief résumé of the case against Shorthouse, as it now stood, including the evidence of Miss Longman and Miss Baddeley, and the man's own lies about his poison-book. As he spoke, the conviction was borne in upon him that, apart from the all-important question of motive, the indictment was pretty damning; and he saw this conviction gradually reflect itself in the women's faces.

"But . . ." Rachel said when he had finished, "it *can't* be true! It's—it's awful!" Obviously the possibility of securing Martin's release at the price of another man's arrest had never really occurred to her; and she was appalled when it happened. "They—some of them—must be telling lies!"

"Excuse me," Miss Lydia interrupted, "but did I understand you to say that the chief reason for Dr. Shorthouse's arrest is the tale told by this girl—Miss Baddeley?"

"How *could* she?" Rachel breathed.

"That is so."

"And you think she is—reliable?" Contempt could go no farther.

"Not in the least, I should say," said Wilson. "But, you see, Dr. Shorthouse himself has confirmed her story—or rather, I should say, retracted the story which he had arranged with her to tell." Miss Lydia bit her lip, and there was a pause of fully a minute.

"But," Rachel burst out, "you don't mean that he's going to be convicted!"

"I don't know," Wilson said. "It is certainly possible."

"But he can't be! He mustn't be! Think of poor Mrs. Shorthouse, and the children! Can't *you* do anything?" She looked at Wilson, who looked at Miss Lydia.

"You see, Mr. Wilson," the latter said with some difficulty, "I am rather afraid that *I* am—partly—responsible for that girl's tale coming out. *I* had told the young man that he must manage to get himself rid of complications with women." She explained as much as she thought necessary of their previous day's conversation at lunch. "I noticed," she added, "that he seemed very miserable about it—but of course I never dreamed of anything as serious as this, or the whole thing could easily have been put off for a while. But, as it is, I feel myself partly responsible for his present position; and I know for a fact that he has no money to spend on proving his own innocence. So, if I might continue

to retain you ——"

"There is no need to do that," Wilson quickly interrupted. "I have not yet begun to earn the fee which you are paying me. The only way, I am convinced, of establishing Mr. Delahaye's innocence is to prove the guilt of ——"

"Not of Dr. Shorthouse," Rachel put in.

"Certainly not, if he is not guilty. Of the criminal. That," said Wilson, "is what you have, in effect, engaged me to do; and that is what I should like to go on doing, with, I hope, rather more success than I have had at present. But I shall have to start again. Tell me—you're quite convinced that Dr. Shorthouse did not do it?"

"*Quite,*" they said. Almost more so, it would appear, than in Martin's case.

"Besides," said Rachel, reverting to George Thorley's views, "why should he? What good would it do him? He's got a wife already—poor thing—he doesn't want two."

"Quite so," said Wilson. "But. . . ." He was thinking hard, and, as usual, had shut his eyes, and put the tips of his fingers together. Rachel and Miss Lydia waited, almost without breathing, till he opened them again.

"I shall have to ask you to help me, I'm afraid," he said, "with some of the possibilities. You see, supposing Dr. Shorthouse is not guilty, it's almost certain that suspicion has been deliberately thrown on him. The disappearance, from his surgery, of exactly the right amount of strychnine is exceedingly unlikely to have been a coincidence."

"You mean," said Miss Lydia, "that somebody must have taken it?"

"Yes."

"And that person was the murderer?"

"Presumably."

"Then who was it?"

"That is where I want your help. It ought not, as a matter of fact, to be so impossible to find out. We want somebody who in the first place was at the meeting at the Institute, and in the second place had access to Dr. Shorthouse's poison-cupboard. Then our supposed criminal must also have had a reason for murdering Cayley or a grudge against Shorthouse, or more probably both. We have, at any rate, these clues to work with."

"Then what do you suggest doing?" asked Miss Lydia.

"I want, in the first place, to know of anybody who had anything of a strong grudge against Dr. Shorthouse."

"This Baddeley girl, obviously," Miss Lydia said. "She's doing her best against him. And she had plenty of chance to take the poison—and help him fake his book after she'd done it."

"Yes," said Wilson. "She had ample opportunity, if she had the motive. But, from what you've told me, and also from what I heard at the Yard, I'm inclined to think that her grudge is of very recent date—only a day or two old, to be exact. What do you say?"

Miss Lydia said nothing; but Rachel, after thinking, agreed with Wilson.

" It was after Mr. Cayley died that they quarrelled, I'm sure; " she said. " She was holding his hand—you remember, auntie—after the meeting, when he came back. And they came to the inquest together, and were very friendly. I'm sure she hadn't a grudge against him then."

" That doesn't prevent her having stolen the poison," Miss Lydia said, " and afterwards, when she'd quarrelled, deciding to accuse him." She seemed to like Marion Baddeley as a suspect.

" But that," Wilson said, " involves her having taken the poison simply for the purpose of killing Cayley, and that means she must have had a grudge against *him*. Do you suggest that she had? "

Miss Lydia would have liked to suggest it, obviously, but had no motive to produce. Neither had Rachel; in fact, she denied that the dead man even knew Marion Baddeley, except possibly by sight.

" I don't think it will do," Wilson said. " There is nothing but opportunity against her, and the fact that she gave the information, which in itself, if she were guilty, she must have known would have told as much against her as against Shorthouse. The person I should like to know a little more about, myself, is Miss Longman."

" Miss Longman? " Rachel thought.

" *She* doesn't love Dr. Shorthouse," Miss Lydia observed. " That was clear enough, that evening, even to ——"

" She hated Mr. Cayley too! " Rachel struck in with sudden recollection. " They had a most fright-

ful quarrel."

"A quarrel?" This was growing interesting. "When? and what about, do you know?"

"Oh, not so very long ago. Some time last year, I should think. I don't know what it was about, exactly. I *think*—yes, I'm almost certain it was about money. Mr. Cayley liked persuading people to invest in things, and he bought Miss Longman some shares in something which he said, or she said he said, was going to go up and up; and it didn't, it went down and down. Miss Longman was absolutely furious—she's very mean about money. She called him a swindler, in public, and she tried to go to law with him, only her lawyers wouldn't take it on. Then she tried to get him chucked out of the Literary Society, and *he* said he'd sue her for slander. I don't think he ever did, but it was a frightful row, and went on for a very long time. It had stopped, though; at least I think it had. At any rate, no one had heard anything about it."

"A quarrel like that, though, a quarrel about money, may last some considerable time," Wilson reflected.

"People don't generally murder swindlers—unfortunately," Miss Lydia observed.

"No. But when you take that in conjunction with Miss Longman's known hatred of Dr. Shorthouse—it's worth looking into, at least," Wilson said. "But the question is—how? If anybody, other than Shorthouse or his dispenser, or his wife—I suppose she is not in question?"

"No, indeed, poor dear!" said Rachel.

"—took the poison, they must have got into the surgery and stolen it. Therefore we've got to find out how accessible the poison cupboard was, and at what hours, and who, within those hours, called at Dr. Shorthouse's house. Here, I think, someone personally acquainted with Mrs. Shorthouse might help." He looked at Rachel.

"I'll do anything you want me to," the girl replied. "I was thinking of going up there to-morrow, anyway, to see if there was anything I could do. It's going to be perfectly awful for her anyway, with all those children and the house to run, and that horrible girl—at least, I suppose she's gone. I thought I could take the baby out, at least, and go shopping, and let her talk to me about Billy. But what is it you want me to do, Mr. Wilson?"

"Nothing, except be friendly," said Wilson, "until I've found out something more. I'm going to discover, which I can from the inspector or from Shorthouse himself, when that poison-book was last checked, and then I want you, if you can, to find out who called or came to the house between that time and the Monday evening when Shorthouse left to go to the Institute—particularly if Miss Longman came. And I'd like to know if the surgery door's commonly kept locked, or if anybody who comes to the house can wander in and out as they please. Do you think you can manage this? I don't want to arouse anybody's suspicions, you know. Just to find out quite casually."

"I'll do my best," Rachel promised. "And I'll —— Oh, *Martin!*" The door of the drawing-

room had suddenly opened, and the released prisoner entered. He looked dazed rather than relieved, Wilson thought, and suspicious at seeing the detective still on the scene. But the welcome he received ought to have given him satisfaction.

"And, oh, Martin," Rachel said when the preliminaries were over, "I'm going up to Dr. Shorthouse's to-morrow to try and find out who stole his poison!"

"Who did *what?*" Martin did not look particularly pleased.

"Stole his poison. Don't you know the police have arrested Dr. Shorthouse?"

"Yes, the fools." Martin scowled.

"Well, but—he's got to be got out again. And Mr. Wilson says we can only get him off by finding out who did it."

"I don't see why *you* want to be taking a hand," said Martin.

"But, darling, we *can't* leave it like that. Specially when you've got out, can we? I mean, you don't want Dr. Shorthouse to be—tried, do you?"

"No," said Martin. "Nor anybody."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Martin, suddenly fierce, "that I'm sick of all this business. What the devil does it matter *who* killed Cayley? . . . You haven't been in prison, Ray. If you had, you jolly well wouldn't want to put anyone else there."

"But, darling, we want to get Dr. Shorthouse out!"

"Oh, all right. I'm sure I don't want him in. But if you're trying to get somebody else arrested, don't expect me to sympathize, that's all. I've had some." He slipped further down in his chair. "Sorry, Ray. I'm tired."

"Poor darling." The girl stroked his hair with affection, but did not sway from her purpose. "Is that all you want of me, Mr. Wilson?"

"Yes, thank you. I think that's all at the moment. I'll tell you the dates as soon as I can." Wilson understood that he was dismissed; but there was one question which he wished to get in before he left. "When you were at the Institute that night, Mr. Delahaye—I mean after you were supposed to have gone home—you didn't see Dr. Shorthouse or Miss Longman to speak to, did you?"

"I've told you I didn't speak to anyone," Martin spoke indifferently; but Wilson had noticed a stiffening of his body as the question was asked. He took his leave in some perplexity.

Chapter XXIV

AFTER THE INTERVAL

Wilson was not ill-satisfied with his new reconstruction of the crime. If Shorthouse were not guilty, a frame-up of some sort was the only possible explanation. "What a fool the man must be, not to have told us sooner!" he reflected. "He's let us waste days, while the real murderer has been covering his—or her tracks." And for a frame-up it was necessary to find someone who had a real hatred for Shorthouse. And for Martin Delahaye? he wondered; but decided that the hypothesis was unnecessary in Martin's case. The young man's own folly had provided all the evidence against himself, without requiring the intervention of any other hand. But how to *prove* a frame-up, whether by Miss Longman's hand or another's, was quite a different matter. However, to this he must now set himself, and he must produce better results than he had yet discovered. In his own mind, if not in Miss Lydia's, his professional reputation was at stake, and he was ready to work his fingers to the bone to preserve it. But the task did not turn out at all easy.

He did not go to see the prisoner, who had been brought up before the magistrates and duly committed for trial, because he felt that a man who had already produced three different stories of his actions on that fatal Monday was not really to be relied

upon as a witness. According to the police accounts, Shorthouse, for the present, was sticking to the third of his tales, though he persisted that he could not account in any way for the disappearance of that large supply of strychnine. Calcott reported that he was "absolutely all in," plunged in complete despair and almost refusing to take any interest in his life or his defence. "He thought he was going to pull it off neatly," Calcott, who was still very angry with Shorthouse, commented, "and he got bumped off just at the last moment. No wonder it's knocked him out." As to the missing diary, he had not a word to say. He knew that Cayley kept a diary—everybody knew, he said; the man made such a fuss about it and the "valuable record of social habits" it was going to prove to after generations; but whether or not Cayley had it on the night of his death, he professed himself totally ignorant. That diary worried Wilson a good deal; he had been to Cayley's house and made sure it was not there, though he had found a great pile of MS. books dating from twenty years back to three months before his death, the majority of them thoughtfully indexed by their owner. The latest of these books he had borrowed, and handed to Jevons to transcribe; but the result yielded no light at all on Cayley's end, and little, it must be confessed, on the "social habits" of the time. It was a singularly dull production. The most interesting part, to the owner, if not to the reader, appeared to be the full details which Cayley had given of all his physical symptoms and the remedies to which he had had recourse.

There was nothing, even in those passages, which bore on his death; but they confirmed Wilson in his desire to get possession of the one book which was missing. After securing this information, he turned his attention to Miss Baddeley, though the prospect of an interview with her afforded him very little pleasure. Still, the question of her possible criminality must be answered. But, after the interview, he was quite convinced that his own opinion was right, and that she was in no way concerned with the crisis. It was plain that, as the inspector had surmised, she had never intended to charge Shorthouse with murder, and was frightened nearly out of her animosity by the result of her disclosure. She began by making an attempt to retract them; but Wilson, though he hated it, was quite competent to deal with hysterical women, and he held her to the point. But there was nothing further to be learned. It was quite clear that Shorthouse had been thoroughly fuddled on the Monday afternoon, and had been ready to believe that he had accidentally poisoned Cayley, though the huge amount of strychnine missing had taken them both by surprise. For what it was worth, the size of the loss was a point in the accused man's favour, for the girl said that she could hardly believe that even a drunken man could have put in so much by mistake. At the time, she explained, she had not had the remotest idea what he could have done with it. They only knew that it was gone. Of course, she was a biassed witness (though her bias seemed to go in alternate directions, according to her mood); but the Scotland

Yard doctor seemed inclined to agree with her, though cautiously.

As to her own motives and relations with Shorthouse, it was clear that he had made his usual casual use of a feeling which he did not return and had no thought of returning. In his desperate corner, he had probably shown an excess of gratitude for her assistance which the girl had misinterpreted; at any rate, she seemed to have thought that she had him in her hands and could easily persuade him to leave his wife and come to her, and Wilson thought there was no doubt that there had been a considerable amount of moral blackmail going on, before the apple-cart was upset. Certainly, the hand which finally upset it was Miss Lydia's; it was after his lunch with her, at which she had so plainly offered him a choice of careers, that Shorthouse had summoned up courage to hint to Miss Baddeley that her hopes were not to be realized, a hint which his much-enduring wife had promptly underlined—with the result that the girl went off at the deep end. Wilson himself felt that Shorthouse came out of the whole affair very discreditably indeed, but he found that most of Shorthouse's acquaintances were disposed to make excuses for him. He couldn't help it, they said; of course, he did like women, but no more than many another who kept himself clear of all entanglements. It wasn't his fault if what in another's case was accepted as an ordinary courtesy was in his interpreted as a proposal of marriage.

Then came the question of his alternative suspect, and, more important, of any possible means by which

the poison could have been stolen. As to Miss Longman, Rachel's story, and her own views about Dr. Shorthouse, were confirmed up to the hilt. She had hated the doctor with all the venom of which a middle-aged spinster, whose advances had been rejected, was capable; and though her quarrel with Cayley had not been pursued during recent months, the Suburbanites still remembered it with bated breath. One witness observed that " she would certainly have liked to kill him then "—and presumably would so still. She was not the type of woman whose wrath disappears by sundown.

As far as motive went, then, she was all right. And, of course, she had the same opportunity as the rest of the world for administering the poison. It was the question of possession that was the difficulty. How could she have got hold of the strychnine from Shorthouse's poison cupboard? Here Wilson had hoped to get assistance from Rachel, but he was disappointed.

The poison-book, he learned *via* Calcott, had last been checked at lunch-time on the fatal day. This was one mercy, at any rate, for it narrowed the interval during which it must have disappeared to about six hours—from two o'clock, when Shorthouse left his surgery after checking the book, to about eight-fifteen, when he started for the Institute. The lecture was timed to begin at nine, and anybody who stole the poison much later than eight-fifteen would hardly have had any opportunity of getting it inside his victim. Rachel, therefore, must endeavour to find out who had visited the house between two

o'clock and eight-fifteen; for, as the surgery door was not kept locked, anyone getting into the house could also get into the surgery.

Rachel did her best, no doubt; but her best was not very productive. Not only was there no sign that Miss Longman had visited the house during the important hours; there was no sign that anybody had. There were only two visitors who could be traced that day, and they both arrived too late to be of any service. One was a maid who called soon after nine in the evening, to enquire about a character; and the other Dr. Midhurst, who came to give news of Shorthouse about half-past one, two hours and more after Cayley's death. But the negative could not be taken as definitely proved, for there was about an hour in the afternoon when Shorthouse and his wife and the dispenser were all out together, and anybody might have got in. There was, of course, a maid, who ought to have been aware of any visitor; but the maid, as Rachel rather sadly reported, was an idiot, and could not say what she had done or not done. Wilson himself, at Rachel's request, visited the house to see "if he could get some sense out of her;" but he failed. There might have been somebody come during the afternoon, or there mightn't. There was the gas; she was certain there was the gas; but whether the gas had come in the morning or the afternoon, and whether it had come on Monday at all, and not on Tuesday, or maybe Wednesday, that she really couldn't say. While he was there, Wilson examined the poison-cupboard, to see whether its very simple lock showed

any traces of having been forced. He was almost certain that he could detect some suspicious scratches round the keyhole; but it was such a battered piece of furniture altogether that he would not have liked to swear to it. And, in any case, to prove that the lock had been forced was little use unless one could come upon traces of the person who had forced it. What Miss Longman was doing on the Monday afternoon no one seemed to know; and Wilson judged it undesirable to enquire of the lady herself.

After this expedition, he returned to his office, and sat down to think things out. The sum of his reflections was a pretty firm conviction that he was right about the " frame-up " against Shorthouse, but not necessarily right about its agent. There might be others besides Miss Longman who had motive and opportunity. Who knew how many other women's advances Shorthouse might have rejected? And, while his mind was on this point, there returned to him the recollection of Martin Delahaye's curious behaviour. Delahaye, he realized quite well, though he had not stressed the fact in Rachel's company, was by no means cleared. Actually, the police had let him go, under surveillance, from lack of evidence, and, if their case against Shorthouse should not prove a sound one, they were quite likely to arrest him again. Wilson did not himself think that Delahaye was guilty, subsequent conversations with the young man had substantially convinced him that his own tale was, broadly speaking, true; but if he should be rearrested, there were two points in which his conduct had been very odd, and which

might tell heavily against him. These were his obstinate silence about the source of his own poison, and his equally odd silence about what he had seen or heard that evening at the Institute. For that he had seen or heard something, Wilson was quite certain. The explanation of the poison he was inclined to think was nothing more criminal than a sudden and most ill-timed excess of loyalty; but the other question puzzled him considerably. The only explanation he could think of was that Delahaye had seen—or heard—something which incriminated somebody, somebody whom he wished to shield. If this were so, it would account also for his very clear desire that the hunt for the criminal should cease—but who could the somebody be? Not Miss Longman; why should Martin Delahaye want to shield Miss Longman? There was only one person, in fact, of all concerned, whom he was in the least likely to want to shield, and that was . . . Stop a moment! Could that really be the answer? Leah Cayley, married to a man much older than herself, whom obviously she did not love, a man of jealous and rather unpleasant disposition, and not very well off in a worldly sense—Leah Cayley, whose beauty was such that she could have had almost any man for the asking——. And, by Jove, was she not actually on the verge of landing a great catch? Was not Sir Eric Pennell, rich, titled, charming, in every way a most desirable husband, was not he, by all accounts, simply drooping on his stalk with desire to fall into her mouth? Was not this, in a lady as calculating as Mrs. Cayley had shown herself to be,

a full and sufficient motive? Of course, Dr. Midhurst had implied that she did not care about him. But Dr. Midhurst was an old fool, anyway, said Wilson uncharitably.

Wilson felt that this possibility at all events merited exploring, and he prepared himself for a further investigation into Mrs. Cayley's past. But, in the meantime, there was another, and very tiresome job which had to be pursued. Whoever the guilty party, it was pretty clear that a conviction would be almost impossible unless some proof of administration of the dose could be found. As it was all but certain that the dose had been given in the course of that Monday evening, the only chance of finding it was to interview all the names on that list, which Calcott had given him, of people who had had any conversation with Cayley, on the chance that one of them might provide a clue. It was a horrible prospect; the bundle of hay, as represented by the list, seemed the largest that ever concealed a needle. Still, it had to be done; and Wilson doggedly set about doing it.

It was two or three days later, after a morning spent on entirely barren interviews on this subject, that he returned home to a belated lunch, and saw a fat letter marked *Urgent,* lying by his plate.

"Your office sent that down, dear," said Mrs. Wilson. "They thought, as it was marked urgent, you'd better have it at once, and I said I didn't know where you were going to be this afternoon."

"Writing looks familiar, somehow," Wilson said, balancing it on his fingers and gazing at it as one

does with letters arriving in unknown hands. "I wonder who it's from." He opened it, glanced at the signature at the end, and gave an exclamation of annoyance.

"What's the matter?"

"It's that old idiot Midhurst, and it's as long as your arm!" Wilson grumbled. "What is he going to lecture me about now, I wonder?"

It was about the crime—and Wilson's face got more and more puzzled as he read it. Dr. Midhurst wrote as a member of the British public, and more particularly as a friend and protector of Mrs. Cayley, who had been suffering very great distress by the criminal failure of the police and everyone else to throw any light on her husband's tragic death. He might add that he, who was in a position to know, better than anyone else, had more than once feared that she might become seriously ill with anxiety. "He does harp on it," Wilson reflected. "I don't believe the young woman has turned a hair over the whole affair; and if she has, I don't believe it's Midhurst she's going to for comfort."

After this portentous opening, which occupied nearly a page of his handsome notepaper, Dr. Midhurst went on to say that the particular matter which he desired to communicate to Mr. Wilson was very painful, very painful indeed; but he had been forced into it by the criminal stupidity of the police. It was, he repeated, *criminal*—in fact, he repeated "criminal" about six times during the letter—to arrest an innocent man for murder on the strength of some information which he, Midhurst, had given

them with regard to the said man's known carelessness with drugs. (Here followed a short disquisition on the moral difference between murder and carelessness, with examples from railway accidents, through which Wilson impatiently snorted his way.) But as the police were so criminally stupid, he felt himself bound to disclose a confidential matter with regard to which he had trusted to be able to preserve his professional honour to the grave. He must, however, tell it now—as it raised the possibility, not to say the likelihood, that the late Harold Cayley had committed suicide. At this point Wilson gave a whistle, and began to read with more attention.

Some few months ago Dr. Midhurst proceeded, Mr. Cayley had come to him in a great state of mind. He was not in very good health at the time, and he was slightly worried about his monetary affairs. Also, he had reached the conclusion that he had no real friends in the world, and that all the projects on which he had set his heart were doomed to disappointment. Altogether, he had seemed very depressed and unhappy, and he had tried to persuade Dr. Midhurst to provide him with the means to "end it all"—to commit suicide, in fact. "Naturally," said Dr. Midhurst's letter, "I did not accede to this outrageous request. I pointed out to him that no human creature has a right to anticipate God's purpose by laying violent hands upon himself, and that it was impossible for any medical man to do such a monstrous thing as provide the means of self-murder. But I fear he succeeded in finding

some practitioner more complaisant than myself, for a little while later he assured me, with rather a meaning look, that he was *'quite well-provided.'* I have not related this unhappy incident before for the simple reason that I had solemnly promised not to do so." Harold Cayley, the letter went on to explain, had very soon recovered from his fit of depression and, feeling heartily ashamed of the "infamous purpose" which he had then formed, had specially informed Dr. Midhurst that he had thrown away whatever it was that he had succeeded in obtaining, and had entreated the doctor never to speak of it again. As he had not, until the distress of Mrs. Cayley, and the criminal foolishness of the police, had convinced him that to break the seal of medical confession was the lesser of two evils. The letter concluded by saying that, on thinking matters over, he felt that it was highly probable that Harold Cayley had committed suicide, and he entreated Wilson to take steps to see that innocent persons were freed from trouble.

"I don't believe a word of it!" Wilson said at last, having sat for a long time silently staring at this effusion.

"Word of what, dear?" Mrs. Wilson asked.

"Of this rigmarole." Wilson slapped it. "I do *not* believe that Cayley committed suicide, that he ever tried to commit suicide, or that he ever wanted to commit suicide. I believe it's a pack of lies."

"But why should he tell you a pack of lies?" Mrs. Wilson wondered.

"I'm blowed if I know—unless it's to save Short-

house from the gallows. Most of his neighbours seem unaccountably interested in that young man. But that doesn't explain ——" He was staring perplexedly at the last sheet of the letter, and now he suddenly whipped a reading-glass out of his pocket, and began to look closely at the lines of handwriting. "Stop a moment . . . I believe I know . . . Give me that case over there." He almost snatched from his wife's hand the case in which he kept his Cayley materials, and took out of it a sheet of paper on which had been traced a facsimile of the torn label of the poison-bottle. This is laid by the side of the letter, and began examining the two very closely through his glass. At last he laid it down with a satisfied sigh. "That's it," he said. "They're the same hand, for a ducat. Now then, for Master Delahaye. What's the time? Two-fifteen? Well, there's a chance he may be back at his office now." He reached for the telephone, but at that moment the instrument began to ring.

"Yes . . . Yes. Wilson speaking. Who is it? . . . Delahaye! Why, you're the man I want. I want to ask you ——"

"I don't know what you want, Mr. Wilson," came Martin's agitated voice at the other end of the wire, "but it can't be anything like as urgent as what I want. Rachel—Miss Redford's disappeared!"

Chapter XXV

TRANSFORMATION SCENE

"*Disappeared?*" said Wilson incredulously. What was going to happen next, in this freak of a case? "Why, what on earth are you talking about?"

"She promised to have lunch with me at one o'clock," the voice said. "And it's nearly half-past two now, and she hasn't turned up!"

"But, my dear fellow——" Did the man think that every girl was kidnapped who failed to keep her appointment? But Martin interrupted:

"It isn't nonsense, Mr. Wilson. Wait while I tell you. It's serious."

A telephone conversation is perhaps not the best medium for acquiring information, but gradually Wilson succeeded in extracting all that Martin knew. Rachel, it appeared, had been really deeply affected by the melancholy position of Shorthouse and his wife—particularly of his wife. During the last two days she had spent a good deal of her time at their house in Welford Avenue, helping the stricken family to regain its feet; and the more she was there, the more convinced she became that by hook or by crook Shorthouse must be got out of jail. Being in that mood, she had hailed with delight a telephone message which reached her office, to the effect that a Mr. Dudley Wright would call on her at twelve

o'clock with important information bearing on the Cayley case; and at twelve o'clock, when Mr. Dudley Wright duly appeared, she had talked to him for five minutes in her own room, and had then gone off with him. So far Rachel's office; then came Martin's share. The impatient lover had arrived early at the rendezvous, dying to discuss with Rachel a new project which had come to him when he was shaving that morning; and, as the minutes passed and she did not appear, his impatience grew until at last he rang up her office to find out where she was, and was told that she had gone off with Mr. Dudley Wright. He then waited another half-hour or thereabouts, getting crosser every moment with Rachel and with Mr. Dudley Wright; and, at last, feeling that there was something vaguely familiar about the name, he rang up the office again for information about Mr. Dudley Wright. Fortunately, the latter's card has been preserved in the office, and still more fortunately, it bore, as well as the name, an address in the Temple. It was, in fact, the card of Dudley Wright, the dramatic critic, whose flat Martin instantly rang up, to know how much longer Rachel was going to be—to be met with the startling information that no young lady, Miss Redford or anyone else, had been there for weeks, and that Mr. Dudley Wright himself had sailed ten days ago for Egypt. Absolutely flabbergasted, Martin had made all haste to call up Wilson; and now, what on earth was he to do, please? and what had this damned Dudley Wright done with Rachel?

"It's probably nothing whatever to do with him,"

Wilson spoke rapidly into the telephone. "I'll come round. Where are you? . . . Where's Miss Redford's office? . . . Dean Street? Well, look here, meet me there in—let me see—a quarter of an hour's time. And see if you can get hold of whoever it was let this fellow in. I'll want to hear all about it . . . All right; no need to worry, yet. Whatever's happened, it can only have happened an hour or two ago. I'll be there in a quarter of an hour —— No, don't say anything to anyone. But, look here, Delahaye, why didn't you tell me it was Dr. Midhurst gave you that bottle of poison?"

"Why, because I promised I wouldn't tell anyone, when he gave it me," Martin answered. "Did he tell you? I supposed he would, if I got into a real hole. Does it make any odds, now?"

"It might," was all Wilson said. "All right, I'll be as quick as I can. Good-bye."

Wilson was thinking with more than his accustomed rapidity, as he threw his papers into their case, and hurried out for a taxi. He would very much have liked an hour's quiet to work out the implications of his new discovery about Dr. Midhurst; but Rachel's safety came first, and, in spite of his encouraging words to Martin, he was very much afraid that she was in danger. She had been lured away—with what bait, he had no idea, but this much was certain—by a man who was either giving a false name, or at any rate pretending (if he were Dudley Wright) to be out of the country; and the pretext on which she had been induced to go was

that of clearing up the Cayley crime. There being no reason why anyone should wish to carry off Rachel in the ordinary way, it was almost certain that her departure was directly connected with the murder; in other words—though it must not be put so to Martin—that the murderer had found her in his way, and decided to remove her. Why on earth she should be in the murderer's way Wilson did not know, and anyway that would have to wait. Probably she had lighted upon something at Medstead which, in the hands of himself or of the police, would turn out to be a real clue, and the murderer knew it. But, for the present, the fact was that she had vanished into London, no one knew where, and the probability was that she had vanished in the company of Cayley's murderer. Where she was now— if indeed she was anywhere—only he knew; and the situation was very disquieting indeed.

As his taxi shot across London Wilson cursed himself for an incredibly slow bungler. What had he been about, to let that girl get hold of a clue so dangerous while he himself had been fussing about with dead ends? He thought grimly that a criminal would have a fairly stiff job to put him out of the way; but a girl of twenty-two was another matter.

By this time he had arrived at Rachel's office, and shot up the stairs two steps at a time. In the central room Martin, looking white and frightened, was pacing up and down before the fire, while two office-girls were having what appeared to be an altercation.

"Thank goodness!" Martin gasped as he entered.

"She hasn't come back, not a word or anything. Only Doris"—he indicated the elder of the two office-girls—"says she left a message for me."

"I put it up on my desk, plain enough for anyone to see," Doris said in an injured tone. "I wish I'd've stayed and 'phoned it, but I'd got to go out, and Mr. Delahaye's number was engaged when I tried it."

"Well, I never saw it, and I'm sure I'm sorry, but I can't say anything else but that," the other girl retorted. "If you don't pin things, so's they fall on the floor ——"

"What *was* the message?" Wilson interrupted.

"Why," said Doris, "just to tell Mr. Delahaye that she'd probably be late, and p'raps not turn up to lunch, and he wasn't to wait. Miss Redford left it with me before she went out, and said to 'phone it to Mr. Delahaye before quarter to one. But I had to go out, and Florence says she didn't see it."

"Well, thank heaven she didn't," Wilson said, forestalling an attempt by Florence at reply, "otherwise we mightn't have known for hours that anything was wrong. Was it you who let this man in"—to Doris—"who said he was Dudley Wright?"

"Yes."

"What did he look like?"

"Tall and big," Doris began. "Sort of middle-aged."

"Well, that settles one thing, anyway. It wasn't Wright. He's not more than five foot six. Go on. How tall was he? As tall as I am?"

"Jest about," Doris said. "But a good bit fatter, bigger, I mean. He'd make two of you, any day."

"Hair? Eyes? Colour of his face?" said Wilson, who was writing in a note-book.

"Reddish," Doris said, answering the last query first. "Redder one side than the other. I mean he'd a sort of a mark—like it might be a birth-mark, on his left—no, his right cheek. *And* his nose was red, too."

"Yes? Go on, you're doing very well," Wilson said.

"He'd a black beard, and moustache," Doris said, flushing with pride.

"What shape, do you know?"

"A pointy beard, a little one. And just an ordinary moustache, I think. I didn't notice. But he had greyish hair, a lot of it. I saw it right over his collar," Doris said.

"Eyes."

"He'd got glasses. I couldn't see them."

"Coloured glasses?"

"No, just horn rims. Like an American. And he talked Americanny, too, now I come to think of it," said Doris.

"Good girl! Did you notice how he was dressed, at all?" But here Doris failed them. She thought he had worn a mackintosh, which indeed seemed likely, considering the damp drizzliness of the day, and she was certain he had an umbrella. But that was all the information she should supply.

"Never mind. It doesn't matter," Wilson said.

"We've got the main points. Now, then. He telephoned before he came, you say. What time was that, about?"

"About eleven."

"Did you take his call? Did he ask for Miss Redford?"

"Yes."

"And speak to her?"

"No. I didn't put him through at all. He said he wouldn't bother her, only I was to tell her he would come at twelve, and it was very important and about Mr. Cayley and Dr. Shorthouse, and would I ask her if she could see him. And I asked her, and she said she would."

"Didn't he ask to be put through?"

"No, he asked not. Else I would have," Doris said, "the same as we ordinarily do."

"What does it matter?" Martin asked impatiently, "whether he asked or not?"

"Only that if he didn't," Wilson said, "it suggests that he was afraid she might know his voice, when he hadn't his disguise to help him."

"Good God! Do you mean you think he was—someone we know?"

"I do," said Wilson. "This lady's description suggests a disguise, at least. But I can't be sure who, yet. Have you got the card he left, still?"

It was produced, an ordinary piece of engraved pasteboard, without any distinguishing characteristics. Wilson took it by its edge, and blew some black powder over it, which slid off leaving a number of lines and smudges picked out in black. "Too

many prints here," he said with distaste. "I suppose you've all been handling it. Anyway, I don't suppose *he* would." He turned it over, and looked on the back. "Good. This is something." On the back was written, in a curious backward-sloped hand, "Information regarding Mr. Cayley. Urgent." He took his inevitable glass from his pocket and pored over the card. Then he opened his case, drew out the exhibits at which he had been staring when Martin rang up, and compared them with the card, particularly the scrap of the bottle label. In a few seconds he raised his head, with a "Yes!", which was more of a sigh than a word. "Where's Miss Redford's room?"

"Here," said Martin, and followed him in. Wilson shut the door on the rest of the staff, and began making a rapid, but very thorough search of Rachel's extremely tidy desk.

"There's nothing here to help us," he said in a minute or two. "I didn't think there would be, but one has to try. Now to telephone, as quick as we can. Is this thing through to the Exchange?"

Martin put his head outside the door to give the necessary instructions, and returned with a question on his lips, but Wilson already had his ear to the 'phone. "Medstead 2260," he said. "Just a minute, Delahaye. I don't want to waste time . . . Is that Dr. Midhurst's house? . . . Is he at home, please? . . . Oh. When will he be back, do you know? . . . Not until half-past five. You're certain of that? . . . What a nuisance! I say, do you happen to know whether

he was in this morning? I tried to telephone him twice, and couldn't get an answer . . . What? . . . Half-past ten till eleven, and then he didn't get back till lunch. Well, it was about mid-day I tried. I suppose your 'phone must be out of order, but it's a damned nuisance when a doctor doesn't keep his 'phone in proper order. . . . No, I'm sure it isn't your fault, only it's extremely important that I should get hold of him—an urgent case. . . . No, I'm afraid a message won't be any use. I must get the doctor himself. Look here, I suppose you couldn't find out for me where he's gone? I might be able to catch him there, if they're on the 'phone. . . . Thanks very much indeed. I'll hang on. . . . I don't know that there's anything in this, Delahaye," he said to Martin over his shoulder during the pause, " but we've got to follow it up."

" Do you mean it was *Dr. Midhurst* ——*?*" The sudden rapidity of this was too much for Martin to follow.

" I don't *know* that anything was," Wilson said. " But I'm ninety per cent sure that it was Dr. Midhurst who came here to-day. And if it was —— Hullo! . . . Oh, thank you very much indeed . . . Twenty-nine, Brazier Road. Thank you. Has he his car with him? . . . Yes, I suppose he always takes it? . . . Thank you very much . . . No, no message. I think I can manage to get him all right now. I'm immensely obliged to you." He rang off, but immediately gave another number. " Official, please

. . . Put me through to Inspector Calcott, please. Wilson speaking . . . *Wilson!* . . . That you, Calcott? Look here, can you get through to Medstead immediately, and tell them to watch Dr. Midhurst's house . . . Yes, Dr. Midhurst. And I want somebody to go to Shorthouse's house, and find out whether Dr. Midhurst called on him between four and five on the Monday afternoon. Can you tell them to do that? . . . What? . . . Yes, of course. I don't know for certain, but I'll tell you as soon as I can. I don't want to waste time now, because Miss Redford's got mislaid, and we want to pick up her tracks as quickly as possible. Can you ask the Medstead people to let me have a man—or could you come yourself? . . . Good man! I think we may want somebody official before we've done. Well, then, will you meet me at the end of Brazier Road in half an hour's time? . . . Because his chauffeur's there, and I want some information out of him, if I can get it. I don't know where to look . . . Yes, all you want to know. Goodbye. Get a taxi, will you? And ask them in the office if they saw which way Miss Redford went," he shot at Martin, who flew out of the room to comply. When he returned, Wilson was just putting the receiver back on the telephone with one hand, while he fastened his case with the other.

"The taxi's here," gasped Martin, who had run like a hare all the way. "And they say they turned towards Oxford Circus. But, Mr. Wilson, what's happened? What were you talking about? What

do you mean's happened to Rachel? For God's sake tell me!"

"I'll tell you in the taxi," Wilson said. "Come along quickly. We haven't too much time."

Chapter XXVI

CINEMA

" Take me to the corner of Brazier Road, Medstead; and as quickly as you can, please," Wilson said to the taxi-driver. He did not tell him to " drive like hell " nor fling him a pound note; nevertheless, the man slipped his clutch in and chugged through the London traffic as if he were going to an exciting fire. Within the taxi, Wilson leaned back on the seat with his legs stretched out and the tips of his fingers pressed together, and remained thus for two or three minutes before he spoke. His eyes were half-closed; he might be asleep, thought Martin, sitting in a fever of apprehension at his side. Was the man going to race him all over London before he gave him a crumb, before even he told him what had happened to Rachel—Rachel, for the past three hours lost in London, in the hands of this Dr. Midhurst who seemed suddenly to have turned into a kind of Dr. Caligari. At this point, however, Wilson opened his eyes, and turned to the young man.

" You mustn't take it that I'm quite certain of what I'm doing now, Delahaye," he said, " even from what I said to Calcott. This haste is simply because, if my conjecture's right, we ought to follow it up quickly."

" But what *is* your conjecture? That Dr. Midhurst ——"

" That Dr. Midhurst's hand wrote those words on the card we've just seen," Wilson said. " I am very nearly certain, as certain as one can be from a hasty examination, that that disguised hand is the same as the one that wrote the label on your bottle. And that hand was Dr. Midhurst's, as you've told me."

" But why? how did you know? Did you guess? "

" I was thinking about the writing," said Wilson, " because I had a letter from Dr. Midhurst in his own hand this morning, propounding a quite absurd theory of Cayley's death. When I looked at the writing of the letter, it seemed to stir something in my memory, and, after I had thought a little, I compared it with the label on the bottle, and came to the conclusion that they were by the same hand, which had tried—rather clumsily—to disguise itself in writing the label. You see," he made one or two technical explanations in a cool dispassionate voice, as if he were merely giving a lecture on scientific method. He was purposely trying to keep the conversation on a dry technical level, in order both to calm Martin and to prevent him guessing what a flood of fear was passing through his own mind. If his further conjectures were right, this callous murderer had already been three hours in undisturbed possession of Rachel's person, and, moreover, had returned to his house for lunch over an hour ago. *Where had he left Rachel, and what had he done to her?*

" Also," he added, " this obviously disguised person who called might quite well have been Dr. Midhurst, if you removed the beard and glasses and the

red colouring, all of which are the natural things to put on if you've got to disguise yourself. And when I rang up his house, I found that he'd been out between eleven and two o'clock this morning. So there's no inherent impossibility in his having appeared at Miss Redford's office, you see."

"But why? What could he want with her? And do you mean he's the murderer?" said Martin anxiously.

"It's a possibility, anyway," said Wilson; and somewhat to his surprise saw a look of relief cross Martin's face in the middle of his anxiety. In a moment, however, the anxiety returned. "*Can't* you tell me what's happened?" he said.

"I can't, I'm afraid," said Wilson, "because I don't know. If Miss Redford had told anyone a little more definitely what she was going to do—or what she'd been doing. I suppose she didn't tell you whether she had found out anything at Medstead, did she? Do you know when she was there last? At the Shorthouses', I mean?"

"She said she was going there this morning, I think," Martin said, "before she went to the office. I don't know"—he wrinkled his brows and tried to think—"I don't know that she'd found out anything; in fact, I'm sure she didn't think she had. She was very worried, last night, about the whole thing, about Mrs. Shorthouse, particularly."

"Why, do you know?"

"Oh, just that she was unhappy, and she was—Rachel was—awfully sorry for her life altogether. People don't like her much, because she complains

and talks about servants—you know the sort of thing. And apparently nobody's been to see her or had a kind word for her, all along—even at the beginning, before I was arrested, when it was Shorthouse who was in the soup. Except Dr. Midhurst—Ray said he'd been very kind. Dr. Midhurst!" the name struck him. "But why—how could that have had anything on earth to do with. . . . Oh, Mr. Wilson, what can have happened to her?"

"I don't know," Wilson said again. "We're going as quickly as we can to find out. Don't try and conjecture, Delahaye; you only give yourself useless pain."

"Just tell me this," Martin begged. "Do you think she's in . . . in any danger?"

"I can't say," said Wilson very gently, "that there isn't a possibility of it. It's not certain—not at all—and you must try and pull yourself together and take it as quietly as possible. If I didn't think there was some danger, I shouldn't be hurrying about London like this. But we can't act until we know a bit more—and until I've seen Calcott. I'm very sorry, but you must try and be as patient as you can." And with that Martin had to be content until they pulled up at the corner of Brazier Road, and Wilson got out. No one else was in sight, only a neat coupé pulled up some way down the road. Wilson turned to Martin.

"I'm going along to number twenty-nine to make a few enquiries," he said. "Calcott's not here yet, so I want you to wait and see if you can catch him when he comes. You know him by sight, don't

you? Good. Well, keep a look-out, and when he comes flag him—they'll be in a car, I presume—and tell him as quickly as you can all that's happened this morning. I shan't be long."

He walked rapidly away in the direction of the coupé, which proved, greatly to his relief, to be standing outside the gate of No. 29. "Looks as if he was still inside," he said to himself. "This may save one journey at any rate." And suborning his naturally brisk walk to what might have been the gait of a nervous hypochrondriac, he went up to the uniformed chauffeur, and asked in a querulous tone, "Will Dr. Midhurst be much longer, do you think?"

"Dunno," the chauffeur said indifferently. "He's been a pretty long time already."

"I'm rather anxious to catch him," Wilson said. "I tried to get him this morning, but I couldn't."

"Don't suppose you'll get him now," said the chauffeur. "He's got a lot of other calls to make, he told me; and he's behind already. You'd better try his house after five; he'll be back then. And he doesn't like people slipping in when he's on his rounds."

"I only wanted a few minutes with him," Wilson said sadly. "And I can't come at five. I've been trying all day to catch him. They said this morning he was at a place in Notting Hill Gate, and I went right down there; but he wasn't."

"If you mean Pembridge Crescent," said the chauffeur, "he was, for I took him there myself. And a precious long time he stayed there, too."

Wilson gave an exclamation of annoyance. "How tiresome! What a fool I am! I must have mistaken the number. And I looked to see if the car was there, too."

"Oh, well, if you go by the car—it wasn't. The doctor told me he'd be a long time, and I was to go off and get some things for him and come back in a couple of hours. So I dropped him and his case and went off. But why didn't you ask? If the car ain't there it don't mean the doctor ain't, you know." He looked at Wilson as though at a mental deficient.

"I *did* ask," Wilson said mournfully. "But I must have got the wrong number. Thirty-three, was it?"

"*Twenty*-three," said the chauffeur with contempt.

"There now! I always make mistakes about numbers. And, of course, not seeing the car, I thought it was no use trying the other houses." He glanced irresolutely at the door of No. 29. "Well, I suppose it isn't much use my waiting. You say there's not much chance of his seeing me in between patients?"

"Bite your head off, sooner," said the chauffeur.

"Very well, then, I won't wait. I'll try and telephone him after five."

"Want me to give a message?"

"N-no, thanks. I think I could better explain myself. Thank you very much."

"Thank *you,* sir," said the chauffeur, reaching a hand; and Wilson hurried off, in the outward semblance of an impatient neurotic, but inwardly heaving

great sighs of relief. That conversation had been conducted under the perpetual menace of Dr. Midhurst's suddenly emerging from the house. As he regained the main road he saw a big car standing at the corner, and Martin Delahaye leaning in at the window. He broke into a run as he neared it.

"Can you come to Notting Hill, at once?" he asked Calcott.

"Righto. Get in. What about your taxi?"

"Would you like to take it back, Delahaye?" But Martin resisted furiously. If they were searching for Rachel, he said, and if Rachel were in any danger, he was coming too, and only force would keep him back.

"Very well, then." Unwilling to take him, but more unwilling to delay a second, Wilson yielded. "Go and pay the man off, then. But you'll have to sit in front. I don't want him to hear us talking," he explained when Martin was inside, and he had closed the partition which separated them from the driver's seat. "No need to frighten him sooner than one must."

"You're frightened yourself, then? What do you think's happened to the girl?"

"I don't know, except that I believe she's been spirited off somewhere by the murderer!"

"The murderer? Midhurst? Here, you're going too fast for me," Calcott said.

"What's it all about?"

"Didn't Delahaye tell you what happened this morning?"

"Yes, pretty well. I gather you think the doctor

called for the girl, disguised, and carried her off."

"Yes, and why? There *can* only be one reason that's at all plausible, that she'd found out something in Medstead that had got to be suppressed. No, don't say White Slave traffic to me. You know better yourself. Listen a minute, and I'll tell you what convinces me it was Midhurst—why I began to look for him as soon as I heard the girl had gone."

"Midhurst sent me a pack of lies this morning. I can't explain how I know it was lies but you'd see yourself if I'd time to read you his letter. *Then* I discovered that the writing was the same as that on your label, and, mind you, he'd already practically denied to me that he'd anything to do with that poison. That was a dirty trick, anyway, with the lad in danger of his life. But, more than that, it was exactly that fact—the possession of the poison—which put young Delahaye in danger. You'd never have arrested him for merely being in love with Mrs. Cayley." Wilson had a small sheet of notes spread out in front of him. "Well, you see that means that Midhurst has provided the suspicion which led to Delahaye; and, more than that, when that trail got cold he also provided the suspicion which led to Shorthouse. Who set us on the track of that missing strychnine? and who would know that it was gone so well as the man who took it?"

"Hold on!" Calcott cried. "You don't know he took it."

"I don't. I've got to prove that," said Wilson. "But I'm certain he did. Then there's this diary

that's disappeared. The obvious person to have taken it, if your people didn't, was Midhurst; and incidentally he lied to me in saying he didn't know of its existence. Everyone in the Suburb knew about it, and it's incredible that Midhurst, his closest friend, should not. And there's another thing. It's a small point, but it tells. Midhurst, when I saw him, talked with perfect knowledge of Shorthouse having falsified his books. Now, those fellows at Medstead leaked once; but, when I was asking about that, I took a good deal of pains to find out whether they'd leaked any more, and I'm satisfied they didn't. And, if they didn't, there's no way (except from the forgers, who weren't likely to split) that Midhurst could have known about that book. But if he took the poison, obviously he knew that the book would have to be falsified, and for how much. I didn't spot this, I'm ashamed to say, at the time; but I've got to admit that the old beast played me pretty effectively."

"You don't like him, and that's a fact," Calcott grinned. "I noticed it at the time. But, seriously, Wilson, I don't want to seem carping, but I can't see that you've got much of a case. You haven't proved he'd got the poison, you haven't proved he ever gave Cayley anything—and you haven't a motive."

"I'm not sure that the motive won't turn out to be the usual one," Wilson said. "From the way he talks about the intimate processes of Mrs. Cayley's mind, you can see that he regards himself as her father-confessor, if not worse!"

"But the rest?"

"Oh, I know, I know. You can't expect everything in five minutes." Wilson was conscious enough himself of the imperfections of his case to be a little resentful of criticism. "But I feel in my bones I'm right, and that's why I'm carrying you off in this irregular manner. You see, Calcott, if I *am* right—and you must admit it's possible—we've got Miss Redford spirited off by this fellow, in disguise, at twelve o'clock and at half-past one he turns up again at home as though nothing had happened—as though he'd safely disposed of her. He's getting desperate, if I'm right; he's tried two suspects and a suicide story; and if Miss Redford had got hold of some information that she shouldn't, something that would definitely give him away—what's likely to happen to her? I don't like it, Calcott—and we're three and a half hours after the fair as it is. We've got to work like the dickens if we're to do any good—and use all the means we can. That's why I called on you."

"You're welcome, as far as the Yard can help," Calcott said. "But it's your shout. I've no idea what you're up to. What are we going to Notting Hill for?"

"Trailing Midhurst. That's where he was at eleven-something this morning. And he didn't go inside the house to which his shover took him, for I 'phoned them before I went up to Medstead. But he sent the car away while he did his kidnapping. It's no use trying to pick up the trail from Miss Redford's office—all that anyone knows is that they

turned in the direction of Oxford Circus. So I've got to try here." He took up the speaking-tube. "Go to the corner of Pembridge Crescent and stop. I want to have a look around." He slipped a photograph from his pocket, and held it out in front of him.

"Midhurst?" said Calcott. "Quite a good one. Where did you get it from, so sudden-like?"

"From a group I found up at the Institute," Wilson said. "It had half-a-dozen of the people we're concerned with in it. So I had a couple of enlargements made of each, separately. You never know when a photograph may come in handy. Now we'll see what he looks like bearded." He began improving Dr. Midhurst's face with his pen. "There, that's the best I can do from the description. Now we'll have his face unadorned to compare with it, and that's all we can do at the moment." He produced a duplicate of the photograph, and put the two in an envelope together, just as the car drew up in Pembridge Crescent.

All but the man at the wheel alighted; and Martin waited anxiously for Wilson to rush off on the trail. But Wilson only stood on the pavement, apparently irresolute, looking round—for what? He might have been wondering whether it was going to rain again. He stared along the street, at the end of which the traffic of Notting Hill Gate was pouring past; then he looked up at the number of the house above his head. "Five," he said. "Twenty-three is, I suppose, down there towards Notting Hill. Let's go and look."

They passed along the pavement, the car majestically keeping them company. Twenty-three was a larger house than its neighbours, standing back behind some thick and dirty shrubs, with two entrance gates, and a drive about ten feet long from each. "Good house to choose," Wilson said. "He stopped the car outside, and behind the bushes his shover couldn't see whether he went in or not."

"You're sure he didn't go in?"

"The inhabitants say no. Of course some of them may have seen him wandering round. Let's have a look." They went into the drive, and looked at the front of the house. "No good," Wilson said. "No helpful windows. Nottingham lace and stained glass. These people don't believe in ultra-violet rays." He went back on to the pavement. "Now, the car's gone. What's he going to do next? He's got to make a change, somewhere, and get to Oxford Circus before twelve. Quick work. Oh! it's obvious, of course!". He went off rapidly in the direction of Notting Hill Gate. As he turned the corner his face brightened. "There *is* one, at any rate."

"One what?" Calcott said.

"Public lavatory. And a constable, just by it. He's got rather a lot of traffic, but there's a chance he may have noticed something. Will you ask, Calcott? Here are the exhibits"—he pushed the envelope into the inspector's hands. "Did he see either gentleman this morning, and if so, what doing, and when exactly?" Calcott crossed the road to interview the constable, while a stream of traffic

coming up Church Street fumed and fretted. In two or three minutes he was back. "No news of your synthetic man," he said. "But he thinks he saw the other—not quite sure."

"When? Where?"

"Eleven-fifteen, or thereabouts, going into the lavatory. He was in a great hurry, and got tangled up with the traffic. He was carrying a bag of some sort."

"He would have been," said Wilson appreciatively. "Good man. Now, then, where next? Eleven-fifteen. . . . You can't very well make yourself up under a quarter of an hour—that's eleven-thirty. And he was in Dean Street by twelve. He'd have to go the quickest way."

"That's Tube," said Calcott, pointing across the road. "He'd never get there overground, with the mid-day traffic."

"True. Let's try the lift-men, and the ticket-office. Bearded he was, this time, if I'm correct. You can't make up in a Tube."

The enquiries seemed endless. The ticket-office remembered nothing. Nor, it appeared, had the lift-men taken down any gentleman in the least resembling the photograph. But, under pressure, the last whom they interrogated—he having just risen to the surface with a load of passengers—had a faint recollection of an oldish gentleman "something like" that one, making a frantic effort to get on a closing lift just as it was about to go down. "It was full," the man added, "so I had to shut the door on him."

"Stairs," said Wilson, and made for them. As usual, there was nobody at the bottom of the stairs, but on the eastgoing platform there were two porters or attendants, of whom the enquiries were resumed. This time the luck was a little better. The younger attendant distinctly remembered a man of much that appearance coming panting on to the platform and just managing to board a City train.

"This looks like it," Calcott said. "But where did he go?"

"Oxford Circus," said Wilson.

"But then where?"

"I don't know . . . Wait!" He addressed their informant again. "Was this man carrying anything—a case, for example? Did you see?"

"No, certainly he had been carrying nothing except an umbrella."

"Cloak-room!" Wilson cried, and led the way back to the lift. "Why didn't I try these at once?"

"What on earth did he take his umbrella for?" Calcott wanted to know.

"In case it rained."

"Delicate sort of creature. Would he have melted?"

"I don't suppose so; but his disguise might have. I should think it was rather a hurried affair, and amateur disguises are apt to run in the wet." He reached the cloak-room cubby-hole, and hammered till a reluctant and sleepy controller appeared. It took a little while to shake the controller into an appreciation of their errand; but when he grasped it he was perfectly ready with his information. Yes,

someone pretty like the gentleman in that picture had desposited a bag—a small suit-case—that morning, about the middle of the morning. "Where is it?" Wilson asked him.

"Why, he took it out again."

"When?" All the onlookers were now tense with expectation.

"'Bout an hour later."

"You're sure of that? Was there anyone with him—a lady, for example?"

"Didn't see anyone," the clerk said. "But, now you mention it, I believe I did hear him say, 'I shan't be a minute,' to someone over his shoulder. I couldn't swear to it; but I believe I did."

"Thanks," said Wilson, while a gasp came from Martin.

"So he came back here," Calcott said. "But where on earth did he go then?"

Wilson stood quite still at the entrance to the Tube station, wrinkling his brows a little. "Twelve o'clock . . . twelve-thirty at the very least . . . and the car fetched him at one-thirty. There's no *time*. What on earth could he have done?"

"Taxi?" suggested Calcott; and made for the cab-rank in the middle of the street, armed with his photographs. Wilson remained on the pavement, looking as if he had been suddenly turned into a statue. Martin, hovering about him in a fever of apprehension, heard nothing except a mutter of two; which, however, filled him with terror.

"Water," he heard. "Too far . . . Maida

Vale, Putney . . . No parks . . . cemetery . . . no." The statue looked across the road, and abruptly galvanised into life. "Calcott!" it said. "Calcott!"

Calcott came back at the cry, obviously empty-handed of news. Wilson, with a single word in his ear, snatched the photographs from his hand and sprang across the street, just as a stream of unleashed traffic began to rush Bayswaterwards. The stream held his companions up for a minute or two, and when they finally crossed, Wilson was emerging from the door of a large house-agents.

"Nothing definite here," he said, "though somebody *did* telephone for an empty house in grounds this morning. There's another man a few doors on, he tells me." They moved to the other house-agent's. "What do we want here?" Calcott said.

"A man—like him—who enquired for an empty house, with grounds, I should think," said Wilson, resigning the photographs. "Here's another that may help you." He drew from his all-containing pocket an enlargement of Rachel's face; and Calcott passed in. In a few moments he looked round over his shoulder, and nodded. The others streamed into the shop.

"No sign of the girl," Calcott said; and Martin's heart sank.

"Depends on the time," Wilson assured him quickly. "What time was the man here?" he asked the assistant.

"Mid-morning some time. I didn't notice exactly," the man said.

"He'd telephoned before, hadn't he? And he took the keys?" A nod, to both questions.

"Where's the house? And what's it like?"

"Merchants' Walk, Campden Hill. Seven minutes from here. It's a white elephant of a place—the owners can't get rid of it. Stands in an acre of ground, basement kitchens, and so on. Sixteen rooms and one bath."

"I want the keys," Wilson cut him short.

"Right . . . Stop a minute. Thorne, have the keys of Willow Lodge come back?"

"No," said an uninterested creature in the background.

"Sorry," the assistant said. "Mr. Houlihan's still got 'em."

"There isn't a caretaker, is there?"

"No. Nobody in the place."

"Then tell me exactly how to get there." The assistant complied, and Wilson turned his cavalcade and walked them into the street.

"Will you break in with me, Calcott?" The inspector looked worried, and muttered something about a warrant.

"I don't want to wait for a warrant," Wilson said in a tone too low for Martin to hear. Calcott looked at him once, and gave a gesture of acquiescense. They set off rapidly for Campden Hill.

"Why did you think of an empty house?" Calcott said, in the same tone.

"The time, chiefly," Wilson replied. "He'd an hour at the outside to take her wherever he wanted, and get back to Pembridge Crescent. I thought of

water—but there's no water nearer than the Regent's Canal, and no one would come back to Notting Hill when he could have got to the Park in ten minutes. Then there's nowhere near here one could stage a train accident, or anything of that sort."

Calcott drew in his breath sharply. "You're as certain as *that*—I mean, that it's a question of a *body?*" he asked very softly.

"It's only this—what we've heard just now," Wilson said, "that gives me any hope. There's just a chance he may have intended to shut her up and get her out afterwards. But I don't feel hopeful. I think——" he stopped.

"What do you think?"

"I don't think he's good enough at disguise," said Wilson.

Chapter XXVII

CINEMA CONCLUDED

They turned in at the gate of Willow Lodge. It was a depressing place, obviously bowed down with months or even years of neglect. The gate was crazy on its hinges; dirty laurels and leggy lilacs filled the drive; the remains of a lawn were overgrown with weeds and strewn with the peculiarly useless and melancholy leaves of ash and sycamore; some flea-bitten Michaelmas daisies, most persistent and lingering of flowers, straggled in what had once been flowerbeds. Calcott did not wonder that the property had failed to find a tenant. But Wilson, without stopping to give more than the merest glance round the "estate," dashed up to the front door at such a pace that the others had much ado to keep up with him.

"In the house, you think?" Calcott said in his ear.

"Yes. Unless there's a well in the garden," Wilson answered grimly. Calcott gave a jump; he had accepted the other's word that this was a place to be searched, but his imagination had not yet really taken in the idea that the girl they were seeking might be lying dead in it. On the doorstep Wilson paused. "That's a damned awkward door," he said, surveying the great Victorian portal. "But here's some confirmation on the step, for what it's

worth."

"Fresh mud," said Calcott, bending down to look. "Good job it's a greasy day. But it isn't confirmation of much, is it? We know he came here."

"Two people came," said Wilson. "Look further along."

"Mightn't that be him coming out?"

"I don't think so. Look close. One of the marks is a definite heel, I think, with the curve pointing to the drive. And if it is, it's a woman's heel. Besides, I don't think he came out this way."

"Why not?"

"Because," said Wilson, who had been conducting some operations with the door, "because it's bolted." As he spoke, he directed his weight against it suddenly at the bottom, and it did not move a fraction. "That's a bolt," he said. "The thing's not as strong as that." He raised the letter-box, and peered in. "There are some footprints in the hall—in the dust. But the light's too bad to see clearly."

"Well, you can't get in here," Calcott said. "What do you want to do? A window?"

"Too awkward," Wilson said. "The sashes will all be stuck. No, let's find another door. He must have come out somewhere." They began to search round the house, and at length found a back door, half concealed by a mass of overgrown shrubbery.

"He came out in a great hurry," Wilson said. "Look at the mess he's made of these bushes." He took a piece of wire from his pocket and bent to the door. "This isn't going to give us much trouble."

Suddenly he stopped his operations and looked up. "Listen a moment, all of you."

They held their breaths, listening with all their might. Far in the distance the traffic of Notting Hill Gate rolled and rumbled; an errand-boy was whistling in the road, and a car, in great trouble with its gears, was groaning up the hill. An aggressive pair of sparrows was chattering in the bushes above their heads. Yet, as they strained their ears, they fancied they could hear, behind all these everyday sounds, something very faint—was it a cry, or what was it?—coming from inside the house. Whatever it was, it stimulated Wilson to intensified activity. A few seconds' effort, and there was a click from somewhere inside the lock, and with a push, the door fell open upon a dark and musty passage. Now the sounds were clear enough, though not very near—a faint cry, and a faint thump, coming from somewhere beneath them. Martin Delahaye, with one bound, shot past his companions, and into the darkness, pulling out matches from his pocket as he went. "Steady!" Wilson called after him. "Don't run. Shout. You'll only fall over something."

In a moment his prophecy was fulfilled, as a loud crash announced that Martin had charged what must once have been a service door. "Ray!" he shouted as he picked himself up. "Ray! Where are you?" The faint sound was repeated.

"It's from the cellars," Wilson said, taking out a pocket-torch and moving along at a somewhat less dangerous pace. "We'll find the way down in a

moment." "At any rate," Calcott observed, "she's not dead."

"No," said Wilson. "Not yet."

"Here are the stairs!" Martin cried, while Calcott was pondering the implications of that last remark. He pushed open a door, behind which a dark hole yawned, and set off down the stairs. Halfway down he met a broken step and plunged with a clatter to the bottom. But through the clatter the voice of someone crying "Here!" was plainly audible.

"It's as well we aren't arresting a gang," Calcott commented on the noise.

Wilson agreed, but added: "I daresay it's comforting to the prisoner, to hear it. At the least, it must sound like an army arriving."

The passage into which they had come was dank and dark and full of creeping things. It seemed to go on for miles, and it had sub-passages branching off from it. "Basement kitchens!" Calcott muttered. "Medieval dungeons, I should call them!"

"Here!" Martin's voice shouted from somewhere ahead. "Here!! But I can't get the door open. Hang on, Ray; we're coming!" The others followed the sounds, and found him battering at a heavy door with his fists.

"Better try unbolting it," said Wilson drily, and reaching up and down shot back two heavy bolts. Too excited to feel the snub, Martin dragged the door open, and flung himself through it.

"Oh, *Martin!*" a faint voice said, as the others followed, Wilson carrying his torch high, as a lan-

tern. A scurrying of beetles and spiders at its approach indicated that Rachel's confinement had not even been solitary.

It was a very ordinary damp stone cellar into which they had come, with a tiny chink of daylight at the far end, where a slit of grating in the roof led to the outer air. The walls were untenanted except for streaks of descending water and a few funguses, and the ceiling bare but for spiders and their webs. On the floor, besides the company of beetles, was Rachel Redford herself, now half-lying in Martin's arms. Her clothes were smeared with dust and damp; her face was white and terrified; a bandage of some sort, which had obviously been round her mouth, was now round her neck, and her lips were torn and bleeding. Besides her lay an overturned kitchen chair which had presumably been the sources of the thumpings, a long roll of bread, half-gnawed and a little object which looked like a brandy-flask. All these things Wilson and Calcott took in, as they paused in the doorway, leaving Rachel to Martin's ministrations.

"Oh, Martin!" was what came to their ears through a turmoil of sobs and kisses. "Oh, Martin, how did you know? I didn't think anybody would ever find me! I didn't think anyone could hear!"

"Hush, darling! It's all right now," Martin soothed her.

"What time is it?"

"Nearly five," the young man said.

"I thought . . . it felt like midnight . . .

but there's the light still, it couldn't be. Oh, *Martin* ——"

"Ssh! What's that?" said Martin suddenly; and they all listened. A sort of scratching sound was clearly audible.

"It's—*it's the rats,*" Rachel said in a tiny bewildered voice, and suddenly slipped down in a faint. Martin gave an angry cry as he bent over her.

"It's all right," Wilson came quickly forward. "Get her out of here, and she'll recover. It's no wonder," he said; and even in the half-darkness the others could guess at the set of his jaw. "Trapped for four hours—in this place!"

"Where's the brandy?" Martin said, without moving. "There was a flask here a minute ago. Quick! Where is it?"

"The inspector's got it," Wilson said, considerably to the latter's astonishment. "I've got a flask, though, that will do as well. But let's get Miss Redford out of this place, first. Can you carry her, Delahaye?"

"Of course—if it isn't too far," the young man amended. Rachel was not a 'slip of a child,' but a sturdy young woman; and he was not a Hercules. As he began to pick her up, however, her eyes opened, and she tried to struggle to her feet, but he persisted.

"Don't, Martin!" she said at last in a weak, half-hysterical voice. "You—you *tickle!*" And at this point Calcott, stepping forward with a strong arm, raised her, and, staggering between him and the

young man, she at length got out of the door and up the dark stairway to the open backdoor, where she collapsed again under the bushes. "Now, I think, a drop of brandy," said Wilson, extracting his own flask from his pocket and unscrewing it. He had followed them, bearing the loaf of bread in one hand, and the other flask, wrapped in a handkerchief, in the other. "Have you eaten any of the bread, Miss Redford?"

"A l-little," said Rachel, gasping as the brandy flowed down. "The—the rats had most."

"Well, I think you'd better eat a bit more. The rats don't seem to have damaged this end," said Wilson prosaically. "I'll just dust it a little. But you ought to be hungry."

"Th—thank you," said Rachel, taking it with a faint smile. She bit it. "I—I believe I *am* hungry," she said with sudden surprise.

"Good," said Wilson. "We'll let Delahaye feed you while we go and collect the car. Don't drink *all* the brandy; it's pretty strong." He turned his back on the pair while he walked with Calcott to the gate. "Your exhibit, I think." He held out the wrapped brandy-flask, unscrewed it, and smelt the contents.

"You think there's something wrong with it?" the inspector asked.

"At any rate I wouldn't touch it for a thousand pounds," Wilson said. "Take it, and get your people to look at it. I think," he continued, "that I'll go back and see if I can get from the girl something of what's happened, if you'll send up a taxi,

and get on to Medstead. I'll meet you there. We haven't a minute to waste now. I hope those men at Medstead are good at watching without being seen. At present, please God, the fellow doesn't know we're after him."

He turned back to the laurel bushes, where Rachel, with Martin to look after her, was gradually recovering something like serenity. As Wilson returned she even attempted to stammer out thanks and an apology.

"Don't thank me," Wilson said. "Thank your office-girl, who forgot to give your message, and so aroused Mr. Delahaye's anxiety in plenty of time. And now, if you're feeling better, could you tell us how you came to get into this pickle?"

"It was all my own fault," Rachel confessed, hanging her head. "I ought to have thought that something was wrong. I tried to telephone to Martin—but the number was engaged—and the man—Mr. Wright—was in such a frightful hurry."

"It wasn't Wright at all!" Martin broke in. "It was ——"

"Half-a-minute. All in good time," Wilson said. "What did this man tell you, Miss Redford?"

The pseudo Mr. Wright, Rachel explained, had come to her as one deeply interested in the unfortunate position of Dr. Shorthouse. He had, he said, a maid newly come to his service, who had recently been with the Shorthouses, and had taken an enormous interest in the Cayley crime. When Shorthouse had been brought up at the inquest she had

acted very queerly, dropping dark hints and saying that if only everyone knew what *she* knew it would not be Shorthouse who was being bullied by the coroner. Her employer had tried then to find out what she meant, but the attempt had thrown her into a sort of hysterical fit; and, as nothing more happened with regard to Shorthouse, he had left the matter alone. But, on the previous evening, which was the girl's evening out, she had been up to Medstead to see her friends, and had come back in a terrible state, sobbing and crying because Shorthouse was arrested and would be hung, and he was innocent—and it was all her doing. "Mr. Wright" had not known what to do; he had urged her to tell the police what she knew, but this had only produced a fearful fit of hysterics, and asseverations that if the police came near the house she would run away, would kill herself, but would not speak a word. And "Mr. Wright" was sorry to say that he believed she meant it; he had had some experience as a doctor, and he knew that there was no way in which you could make a hysterical woman speak if she did not want to. But he was convinced that she knew something—something that would tell in Shorthouse's favour; and, as he understood from the police that the case was practically complete against the young man, and that he was certain to be hanged, he was very anxious to get her to speak, if it could possibly be done. Hence his appeal to Rachel. No—here he lifted a hand in a way that, at the time, strongly reminded Rachel of someone else, but she could not think who—she must not answer in a

hurry. It was a serious matter; the girl was ill, so feverish and exhausted from her hysterical fit that she could not leave her bed; but she still insisted, more strongly than ever, that she knew something, something that would free Dr. Shorthouse, that she would not say one single word to the police—and that she could only tell it to a woman and a friend of Shorthouse's. "Mr. Wright," himself unacquainted with any of the actors in this drama, was, as he said, very greatly at a loss. He had a passionate desire to see justice done, and the innocent man saved; at the same time, he did not want to add to the troubles of Dr. Shorthouse's wife, who must be in terrible distress, with what might turn out to be a mare's nest after all. In this dilemma he had thought of Rachel, whose name he had seen mentioned in the reports of the case as the fiancée of the suspect who had just been released. He felt that possibly Rachel, as her man had so lately got out of danger, might sympathize with the position of Mrs. Shorthouse sufficiently to put herself out of her way a little to help her. He had notified the police, and they were quite willing that Rachel should interview the girl, if she would. Supposing anything of real importance to be disclosed, they would then take the matter up themselves. It was the last appeal, coupled with "Mr. Wright's" tone of urgent concern, that had persuaded Rachel. She had spent half the previous evening with Mrs. Shorthouse, and had gone to see her again before starting for the office, and her heart had been stirred to its depths by the poor woman's misery. She had been un-

happy enough herself, in all conscience, when Martin was in prison; but, after all, if Martin had been hanged, she would only have lost him, while Mrs. Shorthouse stood to lose, not only her husband, but her own and her children's livelihood. She had come away full of desperate schemes to do something to prove Shorthouse's innocence—and she had not been an hour at her office before a simple chance was offered her. All this she explained rather haltingly, in her own defence, feeling that the faces of both men expressed something like commiseration, if not contempt, for her folly.

Martin, at least, made no bones about it. He was still shaky from his fright, and inclined to be cross about it. "Darling little goose," he said, "you ought to have *known* something was wrong. Why ever should the man come to *you* like that—with such a rigmarole? Why didn't you ——?"

"Why ever should he come to me at all, if you come to that," Rachel asked with spirit, "unless there was really something he had to say? How could I have thought there was anything wrong? What had *I* got to do with it?"

"Miss Redford's quite right," Wilson interposed. "She had not the slightest reason for supposing that anyone had designs on her. At the worst, she might have thought the man had been in trouble with the police and wanted to keep out of their way. There was no reason to think the whole story was a lie. But go on, Miss Redford. You went with him—and you came here, I suppose. What happened then?"

Then, Rachel explained with a shudder, it all happened at once. She had begun to be doubtful when they got inside the gates of Willow Lodge, seeing how unkempt and uninhabited it looked; and as they reached the door she had hung back. Then, in one movement, " Mr. Wright " had pinioned her mouth and arms with a long scarf which he must have had ready. He had pushed open the door— " So he'd unlocked it already," Wilson commented— and had carried her, in spite of her struggles, down into that dark and horrible cellar, where he had let her loose, but for a gag round her mouth. There he had explained, by the light of a single guttering candle, that he was very sorry to be a nuisance—but she was in his way. She knew something, " Like that poor deluded servant of mine," he added with a smile, which he could not have disclosed as yet; and therefore she would have to spend some time, say twenty-four hours, where no one could find her, while he got safely out of the way. He did not recommend her to shout, for no one would hear her, and he had gagged her as a little reminder of that. But should she succeed in getting the gag off, he had left her food and brandy, so that she should not suffer. However, he recommended her to keep still. And with that, said in a soft matter-of-fact voice that made Rachel's blood run cold, he had left her alone, blowing out the light, whereat the beetles and the rats came scurrying back again.

Left alone, Rachel had at first striven as hard as she could to escape. She had worked the gag off, not without cutting her lips, and had screamed and

shouted and thumped with the chair as long as she could. Then she had suddenly felt faint, and remembered the loaf of bread that had been left with her. She had taken two bites; but, on reaching her hand to take a third, she had touched a rat who had had the same idea, and in a sudden sick revulsion had thrown it from her.

"You didn't touch the brandy?" Wilson said.

"No. I hate brandy. And besides," Rachel confessed, "I was so thirsty—I thought, if I drank any I should drink such a lot that I might get drunk, and—and the things would crawl over me in the dark."

Having exhausted herself with shouting, she sat still—or rather stood still, for when she sat the blackbeetles crawled over her legs and up her back. She tried to listen for the sound of anyone coming, but no sounds reached her prison. And so the hours had passed, as she alternatively shouted and stood still, hoped and realised that she had no reason whatever to hope, until at last she heard the rescuers' footsteps on the gravel, and put all her surviving energy into a desperate effort to make them hear.

"Chug! chug!" came from the gate; and Martin insisted on carrying her—making a better effort of it this time—to the taxi, while Wilson told the driver to go to Miss Lydia's flat in Queen Anne's Gate.

"But, Mr. Wilson," Rachel asked when she was safely inside, "why should that man want to kill me. . . . I'm certain he did, from his voice when he said goodbye." She shivered again.

"I don't know," said Wilson, frowning a little. "That depends on who he was. Miss Redford, you said when the man lifted his hand to you, you thought it reminded you of someone. Will you try and remember who? It's very important."

Rachel thought for a second or two. Suddenly her face lit up; and then looked puzzled again. "I remember," she said. "But it's ridiculous. It was—Dr. Midhurst."

"*Dr. Midhurst!*" Martin cried; but Wilson silenced him with a look.

"Was Mr. Wright anything like this?" he asked, bringing his doctored photograph out of his pocket. Rachel studied it.

"Yes," she said at last. "That *is* he, I think. At least, not quite. His beard's not quite that shape; it's more pointed. And the mark on his cheek isn't quite so big. But, Mr. Wilson, how did you find his photograph?"

For answer Wilson took the other photograph, and laid it on her lap. She stared at them both for a long time, as the truth gradually dawned on her. Then she looked up with a white face. "It *is*," she said. "It *was*—Dr. Midhurst. When I think of it that way, his voice . . . and a lot of little things, I could have known—if I'd ever have thought of it. Oh! and that's how he knew I was so keen about Mrs. Shorthouse, then."

"How?"

"Because I met him," Rachel explained, "just as I was leaving there this morning. And I talked to him about Mrs. Shorthouse, and what a shame it

was. You see, I thought he'd be interested, because he'd been so kind to her, and I told him how nice it was of him, and I'd let you and the police know that somebody could behave decently. I didn't mean it about you, you know, Mr. Wilson," she added apologetically. "I was just all worked up about it."

"Kind?" Wilson wanted to know. "How had he been kind?"

"Oh, coming to see them, and saying that he was certain Billy would be all right—the first time he was suspected, I mean. You know, after Mr. Cayley died that night, the police wouldn't let Billy go home, but took him off to the police-station in the middle of the night to tell them about those pills. Well, they didn't let him go till two, and Mrs. Shorthouse would have been worried to death—only Dr. Midhurst came in on his way home. I told you that, I think—and said it was all right, and stayed there quite a long time, she said, comforting her. Why, Mr. Wilson, what's the matter?"

"Did Dr. Midhurst," Wilson asked, "happen to go into Dr. Shorthouse's surgery, do you know?"

"I think. . . . I'm not sure. . . . Yes, he did!" Rachel said. "Mrs. Shorthouse said he did just look in, to see that it was all shipshape, so that Billy wouldn't have to bother about anything when he came home. Why?"

"And you told Dr. Midhurst, this morning," Wilson said slowly, "that you were going to the police with all this?"

"Well, not specially this. But I said I'd tell them

all he'd been doing. Why, what did that matter?"

"Only," said Wilson, "it explains pretty well why you were visited this morning—and it also tells me I've been a fool. But, good heavens—what has the man been doing since?" With a sudden movement he stopped the taxi. "I'm afraid I must leave you. I've got to get up to Medstead at once. Take Miss Redford home, Delahaye, and give her tea—plenty of it. She has deserved well enough of us. Goodbye for the present." And in a moment he had hailed another taxi, and was gone.

Chapter XXVIII

LAST ACT

" Medstead Police Station," said Wilson to his taxi; and then, suddenly changing his mind, " No, the nearest telephone."

Arrived at the telephone, he rang up Shorthouse's number, and asked for Shorthouse's wife. " I think she's gone out," said the maid who answered. " But I'll see."

Wilson waited anxiously, and drew a deep breath when a fresh voice said, " Mrs. Shorthouse speaking. Who is it? "

" My name's Wilson. I am speaking for Inspector Calcott. He wants to come and see you in a little while on some very important business. . . . Yes, connected with this case, but I can't tell you over the telephone what it is. Inspector Calcott says will you stay at home until he comes—he won't be more than a few minutes—and not see anyone, anyone at all, until you've seen him. It's very important."

" But," Mrs. Shorthouse's voice said irresolutely, " I was just going out. And it's very important. I shan't be long—it's only to Dr. Midhurst's, and I'll be back quite soon."

" The inspector says," Wilson persisted, " that it's very important you should wait in for him. It may make all the difference to your husband."

"But it's about my husband that I'm going. Dr. Midhurst said——"

"Dr. Midhurst will be able to wait half-an-hour," Wilson said. "The inspector will not keep you long, but he must insist, if you want to help your husband, that you wait for him. We will get into touch with Dr. Midhurst, and tell him we are keeping you for a little while. You need not trouble at all. . . . No, we'll do it. But will you promise to wait, madam? I assure you, you won't regret it."

"Oh, very well, if you make such a point of it."

"Nor to see anyone else until he comes?"

"All right, I won't. But it's very mysterious—" She obviously wanted to continue the conversation; but Wilson, after making a few soothing noises, rang off, rejoined his taxi, and departed for Medstead. "Phew!" he said, pushing back his hat. "That was a narrow shave. If he'd got hold of Mrs. Shorthouse—" For of course, if it was the story of his midnight visit to Shorthouse's surgery that had alarmed the man, he must know that Mrs. Shorthouse was no less a danger to him than Rachel, and what would have befallen her on her visit to him Wilson could only conjecture. But what was he going to do now? For once in his life Wilson bribed a taxi-driver to hurry. The journey to Medstead seemed interminable, and all the traffic-blocks in the world collected on the way. But at last he was at the door of the police-station; and to his great relief, as he jumped out, he saw Calcott in the doorway.

"Well?" the latter asked when they were inside. "What's the news?"

"Identified," Wilson said.

"Midhurst?"

"Yes. Got a car here? We'd better hurry."

"Car; but no warrant," the inspector said. "Can't go getting warrants on your say-so, you know—without the girl."

"Never mind warrants. Fetch him here for enquiries. She's identified him, all right; and we can work the rest out, when we get him."

"Besides," Calcott went on, "I'm not any too sure about the Cayley business. I've been over Shorthouse's people with a tooth-comb, and it's dead certain Midhurst was never there at all that Monday afternoon. Also, I know where he was—down in Fulham, miles away."

"He didn't take it then," Wilson explained. "If I'd been a little quicker I might have thought of that sooner. He took it on Monday midnight, when he went back to Shorthouse's house to tell his wife where he'd gone. He was in the surgery then—I've just heard."

"But, my dear man, how could he take it then? I mean, Cayley'd swallowed the stuff—three hours before."

"Not the same stuff," Wilson said. "Stuff of Midhurst's own, that he gave him. Then he stole strychnine from Shorthouse's surgery, and used it to make up his own supply. If you'd looked in *his* poison-book you'd have found it was all right. See,

this is what Miss Redford told me." He repeated Rachel's story; and added how he had prevented Mrs. Shorthouse from paying the murderer a visit.

"The hell-hound!" the inspector said. "What's he going to do now, then?"

"I don't know," said Wilson. "That's why I'd like to go and ask him, quick."

"Righto," the inspector said. "I'll just get one of these chaps to see about a warrant, and then we'll go."

In a few minutes he was ready, and he and Wilson got into the police car.

"What are we going to do with him?" Calcott asked. "Bluff? We haven't much of a case, you know, as far as the murder's concerned, unless we can get him to spill a bean or so."

"I don't know," Wilson said. "Let's see when we get there. I hope those fellows are keeping a good look-out. We don't want him to get away, and if he's tried another murder once to-day, he must be getting pretty nervous."

"You knew it was poison, then, in the brandy? We've only just heard."

"I didn't," said Wilson. "I mean, I wasn't sure. What was it? Aconitine?"

"Yes. How the hell ——?"

"I thought it might turn out to be that," Wilson said. "It's highly soluble in alcohol. Quick-acting, and doesn't make much of a row. If Miss Redford had taken even a mouthful of that brandy, she'd be dead by now. I thought he wouldn't trust his disguise."

"God!" said Calcott. "What a fiend's trick! Better to have killed her at once."

"Not from our point of view," Wilson reminded him.

The car stopped, and a man put his head in at the window. "He's in his house, all right, sir," he said. "And nobody's been there. Came in about four-thirty. Twenty minutes or so ago his maid came out with a small parcel; but that's all that's happened."

"Post?" Wilson asked.

"No, sir. Delivery, I should think. She didn't go to the post-office. But I don't know where she went." Wilson sat back, and the car drew up at Dr. Midhurst's door.

"The doctor in?" Calcott asked of the maid who opened it. "Will you ask him if he'll see Inspector Calcott for a few minutes?"

"Is it important, sir? Dr. Midhurst's in the surgery. He said he was doing something important, and didn't want to be disturbed—only for Mrs. Shorthouse."

"Has Mrs. Shorthouse come?" Wilson asked.

"No, sir."

"Well," Calcott said, "it *is* important. So important, that I'm afraid I must trouble you to call the doctor. I shan't keep him more than a minute or two."

"All right, sir."

"Better go with her," Wilson murmured in his ear. "Don't give him any notice."

Obediently, Calcott turned. They were only a

few yards behind the maid when she knocked at the surgery door. As they came up she knocked again.

"The doctor didn't answer, sir," she explained. There was still no answer.

"You're sure he's there?" Calcott said, while Wilson tried the handle of the door. It was locked.

"Oh, yes, sir." The maid looked puzzled. "That's a very noisy door. He couldn't have come out without I heard him." Calcott thundered on the door, but there was still no sound. "He often locks the door, sir, when he don't want to be disturbed."

"Well, he's got to be disturbed now," Calcott said, watching Wilson's face.

"I can do this," the latter said, "in a couple of minutes—if you give me leave." He had been scrutinising the lock at eye-level. Calcott nodded.

"It's so important," he said to the round-eyed maid, "that we must risk breaking on the doctor if he's asleep or fainted or anything. A man's life may depend on what Dr. Midhurst has to tell us." And that, he reflected, was true enough.

Meanwhile Wilson was prodding and poking patiently at the lock. It seemed more like twenty minutes than two—but at last the welcome click was heard, and he straightened himself.

"Go carefully," said Calcott, with his hand on the handle. "He's had plenty of warning, while you were making all that noise. Don't go and get into trouble."

"I think we're safe enough," Wilson said; but he did not look as pleased as he should have done at the thought. "I'm afraid he hasn't heard us."

Nor had he. There was no movement in the surgery, as they pushed the door cautiously open. Then Calcott gave an exclamation, and threw it wide. Reclining, as if at his ease, in a large leather armchair, lay Dr. Midhurst. His face was dusky, and his lips parted, as if he had stopped in the middle of taking a breath and thought better of it; but he neither looked up nor stirred as they entered.

"Damn him!" Calcott slammed the door on the maid, and shoved a chair in front of it. "He's got ahead of us." He sniffed the air. "Prussic acid, eh?"

"Looks like it," said Wilson. "How the dickens did he guess?" He stared angrily at the corpse as though it could tell him.

"Well, he certainly had a well-stocked poison cupboard," Calcott said. "Wonder what it was he gave young Delahaye. Well, I suppose he won't tell us now. Hullo!" From a table in the window he picked a long envelope. "This seems to be for you." He threw it over to Wilson, who opened it and began to read, while Calcott went up to Midhurst's body and began feeling its hands.

"Idiot!" Wilson said, after having perused a couple of lines of the letter. "I suppose I ought to have guessed."

"Who's the idiot?"

"Mrs. Shorthouse. She rang him up and told him I'd forbidden her to go. That's what warned him in time. . . . Um-m-m—Good Lord! Calcott, didn't your man say Midhurst had sent out a parcel, just now?"

"Yes, by hand. About twenty minutes ago."

"Where's the 'phone?" With one bound, Wilson had it in his hand, while the other hand feverishly searched the directory. "Do you know Cayley's number?"

"2593," the other replied, and Wilson repeated it to the instrument. After a longish delay, during which Calcott stared at him in surprise, his call was apparently answered, and he then asked to speak to Mrs. Cayley.

"What? . . . How long ago? . . . Ten minutes? . . . Do you happen to know whether she had a parcel delivered to her before she went? . . . Well, did she open it? . . . You don't know? Do you know where she went, at all? . . . I see. Well, the inspector wants to ask you a few questions. He'll be coming along directly, so mind you don't go out. And if you find that parcel anywhere, you get hold of it and keep it for the inspector." He put the receiver down, and turned back to Calcott.

"Mrs. Cayley's maid," he explained. "Can we go there at once?"

"And I want to ask her questions! *What* questions do I want to ask her?" said Calcott, finding the explanation inadequate.

"About a parcel," Wilson said, "which Dr. Midhurst sent to her by hand half-an-hour ago. Read that." He tossed over the letter which had been lying on the table. "And then we can go on to the Cayley's house, if you will, and leave a guard

here. *He*'ll keep." He looked at the reclining body of Dr. Midhurst without reverence.

"One of these confessions?" Calcott asked, unfolding the letter.

"I don't know what you'd call it," Wilson said. "I daresay it'll serve."

Chapter XXIX

CURTAIN

"Mr. Henry Wilson"—the letter began abruptly——

"Mrs. Shorthouse, that very stupid woman, informs me that she cannot come to see me, because you have told her to wait at home until the inspector—who is, possibly, stupider—comes to call on her. Also that she is not to let anyone in—even me—until he calls. So I conclude that you have been given some information, and that you will shortly call on me. This call, I may inform you, I propose to anticipate.

"Mrs. Shorthouse is so ill-trained in expressing herself that I cannot make out whether she has passed the information on, or whether I was too late in interviewing Rachel Redford. As to the latter, it may facilitate your operations to know that she is at Willow Lodge, Campden Hill. You will find her there—and perhaps you had better go quickly. The keys of the house are on the mantelpiece, but you will have to exercise a little ingenuity in getting in.

"I should like, if I may, to draw your attention to the fact that the elimination of Cayley was arranged so as to cause the minimum of inconvenience to everybody; and if women would only learn to keep their mouths shut no harm would have been

done. I had specially instructed Mrs. Shorthouse that my visit to her on the Monday night was an act of Christian charity upon which no stress need be laid; but with a woman like that you have to repeat your instructions every hour, if they are to be carried out. She has a mind like a heap of loose sand. Otherwise, if you will excuse my blowing my own trumpet a little, all had been carefully arranged so that nobody should suffer. Cayley, of course, had to die, in order to leave the way clear for Mrs. Cayley to lead the life for which she was meant; but it would have been extremely disproportionate if anyone had been hanged for him. I did not, however, desire to leave a complete blank, since the police are so tiresome when they have nothing to do; and when young Delahaye came to me bleating his troubles I thought that to provide him with a little strychnine could do no harm and might possibly prove a useful trail for you to follow up. At one time, I even hoped he might have used it on Cayley, and saved me the trouble; but he had not the pluck. You will observe that you could never have proved any case against him, for only I knew of the existence of his strychnine, and I naturally should not have informed you. (I had, of course, no fear that he would actually have used it on himself; that weak-minded, neurotic type is one which I have frequently met in my practice. It cries out a great deal about suicide, but fails to implement its words.) When I thought you had had enough of that trail I provided you with another, leading to Shorthouse—who deserves a little discomfort, I think

you will agree, for his immoral and careless habits, and for interfering with another man's practice. You could not however, have proved motive; and his counsel would, in the last extremity, have got him off. Further, in order to give you a handsome choice of solutions, you had the possibility of Cayley's suicide. I may freely admit to you, now, that there was a certain admixture of romance in this last suggestion. I did have a discussion with Cayley upon suicide; but it was for the purpose of seeing whether there was any chance of inducing him to take his own life. I regretted to observe that there was none. It is strange how difficult it is to convince persons of his type that their lives are of no conceivable value to anyone.

" I can afford, I think, to commiserate with you, Mr. Wilson. You have not made a great success of this case, have you? You have gone after each red herring with the enthusiasm of a terrier chasing fleas, and I very much fear that your incompetence has resulted in the loss of at least one life which you will probably consider valuable. But chiefly I commend to your notice your stupidity in the matter of Leah. For this, I must confess, I admire her—that she should have been able, so easily and so effectively, to conceal from a ' trained investigator ' her real thoughts, and to delude you into the belief that her personality was in no way concerned in her husband's death; or that, at least, she was quite unaware of it. No doubt this rather vapid young man who has recently become attached to her afforded as good a cloak as any. Nothing could have

been of happier augury for our relations in the future than her behaviour during the past weeks, and I am sorry that they cannot be consummated, and that she will not be alive to receive your congratulations. In the letter which I sent her I have mentioned this, but not too clearly, lest her spirit should take fright at the last moment. We have been destined for each other for years, and it is unthinkable that one of us should survive alone.

"I wish you better luck in your next effort, and remain

yours sincerely,

LAWRENCE MIDHURST.

"P. S. You were right, obviously, in your conjectures about Cayley's diary. I had it in mind to destroy it; but on second thoughts, I fancy it will give you pleasure to read—when it is too late."

"Damned cheek!" was Calcott's first reaction on reading this effusion. Then—"What's he mean about Mrs. Cayley? That she was in love with him?"

"Presumably," said Wilson. "Also, I imagine, that he's sent her a portion of the stuff he's just consumed himself—as a Greek gift. That's why we're going to her house now—if you'll come."

"Good God!" Calcott made a jump for the door. "But . . . of course, that was what you rang up about. And she's gone out."

"Yes," said Wilson. "But no one knows where. And no one knows whether she took her parcel with her or not. And, as she may be coming back—perhaps we'd better go."

"I should think so!" Rapidly Calcott left the room, and summoned a police-constable from the road, to whom he deputed the task of guarding the surgery until his return. Then, with Wilson beside him, he jumped into the car.

"Well, you didn't like him, and he certainly didn't like you," he said, reverting to the subject of Dr. Midhurst's letter, which he had thrust into his breast-pocket and was now re-reading. "Can't say I disagree with you—the smooth-faced beastly villain! Did you notice how he calmly admits he gave that boy strychnine? I suppose he'd got his plot all worked out, even by then?"

"I presume so," said Wilson. A cold anger against the dead man was still consuming him. "You will remember when Delahaye received it—only three days before the murder."

"But, I say," Calcott said, "what do you think of his statements about the woman, eh? Mrs. Cayley, I mean. That he and she were in love, and that she was simply stalling us?"

"As to that," said Wilson, "we have not yet got the lady's version. I am inclined to think that, on that point, our friend's much-boasted knowledge of psychology failed him a little. But we shall see. Here we are, I think." He jumped out, and walked up Cayley's garden-path.

"Mrs. Cayley 'asn't come back," the ferret-faced maid said as she opened the door. "Nor she ain't opened her parcel, neither."

"Thank God!" Calcott said.

"It's in the 'all," the maid pursued. "I found it in 'er room, and I brought it down."

Sure enough, on the hall table lay a square parcel, about the size of a half-pound box of chocolates, tied up in white paper of the kind chemists use, and marked in Dr. Midhurst's unmistakeable hand. "Mrs. Cayley. By hand. Urgent." Calcott took it into the sitting-room, shutting the maid out, and began to cut the string. "Looks as if he'd sent her enough," he said.

"It is probable," Wilson remarked, "that he included more inducement than his letter stated."

The box was by this time uncovered. On the top lay a folded sheet of paper. Calcott raised the lid, disclosing four rows of expensive-looking chocolates. "You're right," he said, taking one out, and examining it. "They've been cut open." He unfolded the letter, which consisted of a few lines only.

"My dearest"—it ran ——

"This is the last and greatest service that I can do you. I wish, in a way, it could be something else; for there are so many things we might have done together, you and I. But this is best, as you will understand when you know everything. Only, if I am really to serve you, as is the wish of my heart, you must take this gift and taste it quickly, before it is useless.

All my love, darling,

LAWRENCE."

"Umph! I think these are *our* perquisite," Calcott remarked.

At this moment, as they stood there, gazing at the tempting rows of chocolates, there was the crunch of a hurried step on the gravel path. Then the lock clicked, someone entered the hall, and a loud, angry woman's voice cried, " Norah! *Norah!* Where are you? "

" Who's that? "

" The owner of the chocolates," Wilson said drily. Calcott looked his surprise. " I've heard her shout like that before. It rather destroys the quality of the voice, doesn't it? "

" Norah! " the voice cried again. " Bring down my suitcase *at once! What!* I *told* you to pack it this morning! Why can't you *listen* to a thing —— Hullo! What are you doing here? " Calcott had stepped out into the hall.

" I want a word with you, madam, if you'll spare me a minute."

" You'll have to be quick, then, for I'm in a hurry," Leah Cayley said crossly.

She was dressed for going out, and very well dressed too. The fur coat she had on could not have cost less than a hundred guineas, the inspector calculated.

" Well, what is it? "

" It's about a parcel," the inspector said, " that you received this afternoon." He had stepped back into the sitting-room, but took care to stand so as to screen the chocolates from her view.

" Parcel? What parcel? I don't remember any parcel."

" A parcel," the inspector amplified, " marked

urgent. It was delivered here by hand, about a quarter of an hour before you went out."

"Oh, yes!" Leah Cayley laughed. "I remember it coming. But I haven't any idea what I did with it. It was only from Dr. Midhurst, and I didn't bother about it. I was in a hurry, I'd an appointment." She gave a little self-conscious toss to her head, and appeared to be expecting an enquiry. "I didn't expect to be coming back here, you see."

"Do you mean," said the inspector incredulously, "that you got a letter marked urgent, and you didn't open it—though you knew you were going away?"

Leah Cayley made an impatient movement. "I tell you it wasn't of any importance," she said. "It was only from Dr. Midhurst, and he marks all his postcards Urgent—as if one hadn't anything better to do than to run round after him! I never look at half the things he sends me. I knew there wouldn't be anything in that that couldn't keep."

"Well, I'm damned!" Absolutely flabbergasted, the inspector stood and stared at her in silence.

"Well!" said Leah Cayley. "What's it about? Why can't you speak? What's the matter with the parcel?"

"Mrs. Cayley ——" the inspector began, collecting his wits from the shock. But he was cut short.

"Not so much of your Mrs. Cayley, please," said that lady with an indescribable air. "If you want to know, my name's Lady Pennell."

"What!" The gasp came from both men this time.

"Yes," with a triumphant nod. "Sir Eric and I were married this morning. We're leaving for France to-night—only that stupid maid of mine forgot my suitcase on the car . . . And now, will you please tell me what you want quickly. Sir Eric is waiting, and I've no time to spare."

Completely bewildered by the sudden turn of events, the inspector looked at Wilson for a cue.

"I should think we had better give Lady Pennell her letter," the latter said; and Calcott took it out of his pocket.

"Well, of all the cheek!" said the owner. "Do you mean you've been opening my private letters?" But as she read it, the anger died from her face, and was replaced by a look of blank astonishment. "But—but he must be mad! What on earth does it mean?"

"You're surprised, to get a letter like that, from Dr. Midhurst?" Wilson asked.

"*Surprised!* I should think I *was* surprised! What does he think he means by it, that's what I want to know! The impertinent old booby! Here, you can take his letter, if that's what you've come for. I don't want it, and it's nothing whatever to do with me." She flicked it contemptuously to the floor, and stood there, her cheeks a little flushed with indignation and haste, making as beautiful a picture as Wilson had ever seen.

"You're sure," he asked, "that Dr. Midhurst never wrote to you before—in that strain?"

"Neither wrote nor spoke," Leah Pennell replied promptly. "I'd have very soon told him off if he

had. Who wants *him*—a doddering old grandfather if you like!" The irony of her unconscious comment on the dead man's passion was almost too much for Calcott, in spite of his official position. "Of course, he's always wanting to paw me about," she added with an afterthought. "They do, when they get that age. But there's never been anything in it—anything you need *tell* anybody about," she added with a little anxiety in her voice. "Well? Anything else you want?"

"I think not," said Calcott, having received a sign from Wilson. "I think that's all we need trouble you about, Lady Pennell."

"'Ere's yer case, mum," said a surly voice at the door.

"Thank goodness! Well, then, I'll be going. Sir Eric's club has his address, if you *should* want to write to me," said Leah, and with a perfunctory smile was gone.

"Well, I never!" said Calcott inadequately. "Can you beat it? That's put paid to him all right." He picked up Midhurst's letter, and stared at it. "Think of it—him planning so carefully how she was to die with him, and all the while *she* was getting ready to go off with her young man, and never even troubled to open his letter. By George, I wish he could have heard her just now!"

"So do I," said Wilson. It was his sole summing up of the dead man.

"Well." Calcott drew a deep breath, and returned to business. "I'd better be getting back, I

suppose. I'll have to see about taking *him* to the mortuary."

"You might see if you can find that diary," Wilson said.

"All right. But aren't you coming?"

"No. I've something I want to do first, and you don't need me. I'll look you up some time later in the day."

"Righto." Calcott turned to depart, replacing the letter in his pocket.

"Hi!" Wilson called him. "Don't leave the chocolates!"

"Good God!" Calcott made a grab at them. "Supposing I had! We'd have had another inquest for sure, on the servant."

"I'm not sure that she'd really be a serious loss," said Wilson, as he departed.

Chapter XXX

CURTAIN CALL

It was a rather chastened inspector who greeted Wilson on his arrival at Scotland Yard a couple of hours later.

"You were right in making all that fuss about the missing diary," he said. "It makes the whole thing perfectly clear."

"Why, what does it say?"

"Simply that he's decided to sack Midhurst and have nothing more to do with him, because he can't stand the way he tries to make love to his wife, and talks about him—Cayley I mean—standing in her light. It isn't quite so much what it says, as the way it's written. If we'd found *that,* after Cayley's death, we'd have been on to the old fiend in no time."

"Which presumably is why we weren't allowed to find it," Wilson said. "Is that all?"

"Isn't that enough for you? What else did you expect to find?"

"Well, is there nothing about Midhurst's being out-of-date, or some such thing? No professional reason for sacking him?"

"Oh, I see. No, there isn't. In fact, there's rather a lament that he's got to sack him, because he's such a good doctor, and the only one who ever understood Cayley's tummy, or something of that

sort. I suppose he buttered him up about it, in order to keep seeing Mrs.," the inspector said.

"So I should imagine. But that, I suppose, explains why he took his fatal dose so meekly from Midhurst's hands. Professionally, he trusted him as much as ever. It was only, wasn't it, that he wouldn't have him in the house?"

"Yes, of course, that must be so. Great heavens, what a fool the man was!" Calcott said. "But, you know, it's just as well the fellow's dead—Midhurst I mean. We'd have had no end of a job to bring it home to him, without his confession, and without anybody who saw the dose administered. In fact, I don't think we could have got him hanged without his own evidence. That's what riles me—to think he had the laugh of us, and we couldn't have copped him, even if he hadn't died. Why, what are you grinning at?"

"This." Wilson, whose face looked more serene than it had done for days, produced a folded paper from his pocket, and laid it on the inspector's table. "I had to go to forty-nine people to get it, but I got it at last. I think you'll find it fills up your holes for you."

"Does it, by George?" Calcott opened the paper, which was a half-sheet covered in Wilson's writing, and signed "Amelia Bradlington." "Who's she?"

"Old lady at the Institute party. A very nice-minded old lady. Read it and see," said Wilson.

"On the night of the Institute party," Calcott read, "'I went out of the lecture-hall a little while

before the lecture began, because I was feeling the heat and the smoky atmosphere, and I went and sat in a chair in a little alcove in the main hall. I sat rather far back, to be out of other people's way, and I do not think I could have been seen by anybody in the hall. While I was sitting there, Mr. Cayley and Dr. Midhurst came up. They were talking, and they stopped just by the alcove. I did not intend to listen to their conversation, but I could not help hearing it. Mr. Cayley said he was not feeling at all well, and his bowels were very painful',"——

" You wouldn't believe," Wilson interposed, " the trouble I had to get the old soul to utter that word."

—" 'bowels very painful. Dr. Midhurst then said he could prevent their troubling Mr. Cayley that evening, and he would give him something which he had better take quickly, as it required a little time to act. Mr. Cayley was standing so that I could just see him, and I saw him put his hand to his mouth and swallow something. I expect it was a pill, but I could not say. Then they went away. I did not tell the police about this, when they asked me before, because Mr. Cayley was not talking to me, but to Dr. Midhurst, and I was not meant to hear; and I did not like to talk of such things to anyone. But I remember it quite clearly. (Signed) Amelia Bradlington.' "

The Inspector stared at this document for a full minute, and then burst into a roar of laughter.

" Heavens and earth! And we might have known all along, but for one old lady's Victorian prudery!

Well, well! It's not much use to us now, though—though it's very nice of you to have brought it along."

"I'd made up my mind to get it," Wilson said. "I am not going to be indebted to a murderer for solving my problem for me."

"You're puffed up, my lad; that's what it is," Calcott replied. "We poor devils of professionals are too humble to be anything but grateful for a hint, wherever it comes from."

The story ends, as it began, in the hall of the Medstead Literary Institute. For some weeks after Cayley's death that building had been closed, as an outward and visible sign of Mrs. Fremantle's indignation at the way in which outsiders had intruded their personalities into an investigation which properly belonged to her alone. But before Christmas she relented; and early in the New Year Wilson received an enormous square of pasteboard which informed him that Mrs. Fremantle and the Committee of the Institute—who suitably remained anonymous—would be delighted to see him at a *conversazione* in its Hall, to be accompanied by light refreshments and followed by a lecture on the drama of Moldavia. Wilson was not interested in the drama of Moldavia, and he had just written a polite refusal when Tony Redford rang up, and besought him to accept. There was a special reason, he added. Wouldn't Mr. Wilson for once make a martyr of himself, and go?

Mr. Wilson would. There was no real reason

why he should not, he had no other engagement. Accordingly, a cold night in mid-January saw him entering the portals of the Institute, which was already three parts full of a mixed gathering of all ages. As he entered, he passed within a yard of Miss Jane Forrester, who drew herself haughtily aside to give him room. There was one member, at any rate, of the Institute who did not feel that his presence there conferred any favour on it.

"Hullo!" said a youngish man, coming up to him with a cheerful smile. "You *are* Mr. Wilson, aren't you. You won't remember me, though."

"Yes, I do," said Wilson, shaking hands. "You're Mr. Thorley, who introduced me to the Guest House. How are you?"

"Oh, much the same. Loungin' round an' sufferin," Thorley replied. "We don't get your sort of excitement every day of the week, you know. We have to put up with a humdrum kind of life. But I mustn't keep you. There's another part of the hall where your presence is urgently desired. Allow me to guide you to it." He threaded his way rapidly through the throng, Wilson following to the best of his ability, to where a yellow-haired young man was supplying an old lady with ices. Just beside them stood a girl with bright brown hair and eyes, and a general air of happiness. "Permit me—Mr. Wilson, *Mrs. Delahaye.*"

"So you've taken the plunge!" said Wilson, when congratulations were over. "Speaking as an old married man, I don't think you'll regret it. When did it happen?"

"A month after we saw you last," said Martin Delahaye, who had mysteriously turned up from nowhere. "I didn't think, after that business at Notting Hill, that I could let Rachel go about by herself any longer. And *she* didn't think I was fit to be left to my own devices."

"I must say I agree with Mrs. Delahaye," said Wilson, thinking that matrimony had improved the young man. He looked altogether healthier and better-tempered than on his last appearance. "I don't think anyone could have made much more of a mess of his own position than you did last September. Why on earth couldn't you have told me that it was Mrs. Cayley you saw that night at the Institute?"

Martin jumped as if he had been shot. "Why? *How on earth* did you know?"

"Guessed," said Wilson briefly. "I didn't see who else you could have been shielding. Won't you do me a last favour, and tell me what it was you saw, or heard? It can't do her any harm now, you know."

"No, indeed! Riviera with Pennell—and I hope he likes it!" Martin chuckled. He appeared to be completely cured of that infatuation, at any rate. "Why, no. I don't see why I shouldn't tell you. I was an idiot, that's all. I think I was completely off my head, that night. I told you, I couldn't go away—I couldn't bear to go and leave her there, with Pennell. So I just went out and hid in the corridor. And then—she and Pennell came out together, talking frightfully earnestly, and I heard her

say, ' It'll be all right, after to-night. Really, Eric, it will. I've absolutely got him settled, to-night.' I remembered it, because I would have remembered anything she said. And then—when I heard what had happened, I thought—I thought all sorts of rubbish."

" Whereas, in reality," Wilson said, " she was, in all probability, only arranging for Sir Eric to see her home."

" Probably," Martin agreed. " But I'd have thought anything—about her. I told you I was off my head. And when I thought you might be going to go for her—I was mad, of course. That's why I wanted everybody to drop the thing. I was terrified I'd have to give evidence against her."

" And then you pretended," Rachel said severely, " that you'd got a pain in your tummy, when it was only disappointed love."

" It wasn't all pretence," Martin protested. " I did feel rotten in those days—I've never had such a beastly time. And—I don't suppose you'll believe it, but it's true—I did get a frightful stomach-ache, quite often, after I'd been with her. I suppose it was general nerves; anything that puts me out always goes to my middle, as you ought to know by now. I piled it on a bit, for your sake; but it wasn't all lies." He gave a wriggle, as though the mere thought of that time had disturbed his internal economy. " But, thank goodness, it's all over now."

" Yes, thank goodness! " Rachel echoed. " And Billy Shorthouse ——" she turned to look for the young doctor, but he had disappeared—" Billy's got

his radium clinic, and he's as happy as anything. And so's Molly."

" Mrs. Shorthouse," Miss Lydia supplemented for Wilson's benefit. " The wicked flourishing like the green bay tree in fact. Neither you nor Billy, Martin, deserve an ounce of your luck. And I've heard that even that unpleasant young woman who dispensed—is that the word?—for him, has found another job and another young man to worship. It's a most ill-arranged world. Well, Mr. Thorley, what's the matter? " George Thorley, his face full of an amused importance, was pushing his way towards them.

" I'm awfully sorry," he said, " and all that. But I've got to interrupt this reunion for a minute or two. Mrs. Fremantle—as the original discoverer of the murderer ——"

" As the what? " Wilson asked.

" Didn't you know that she told your inspector friend to arrest him, the day after the crime? It's true she changed her mind about six times after that, but that's neither here nor there. Anyway, she's sent me now "—Wilson looked round, and saw that an avenue had mysteriously opened through the spectators, at the end of which Mrs. Fremantle, like the Venus in the Louvre, dominated the view— " to say that she desires to be introduced to Mr. Henry Wilson! "